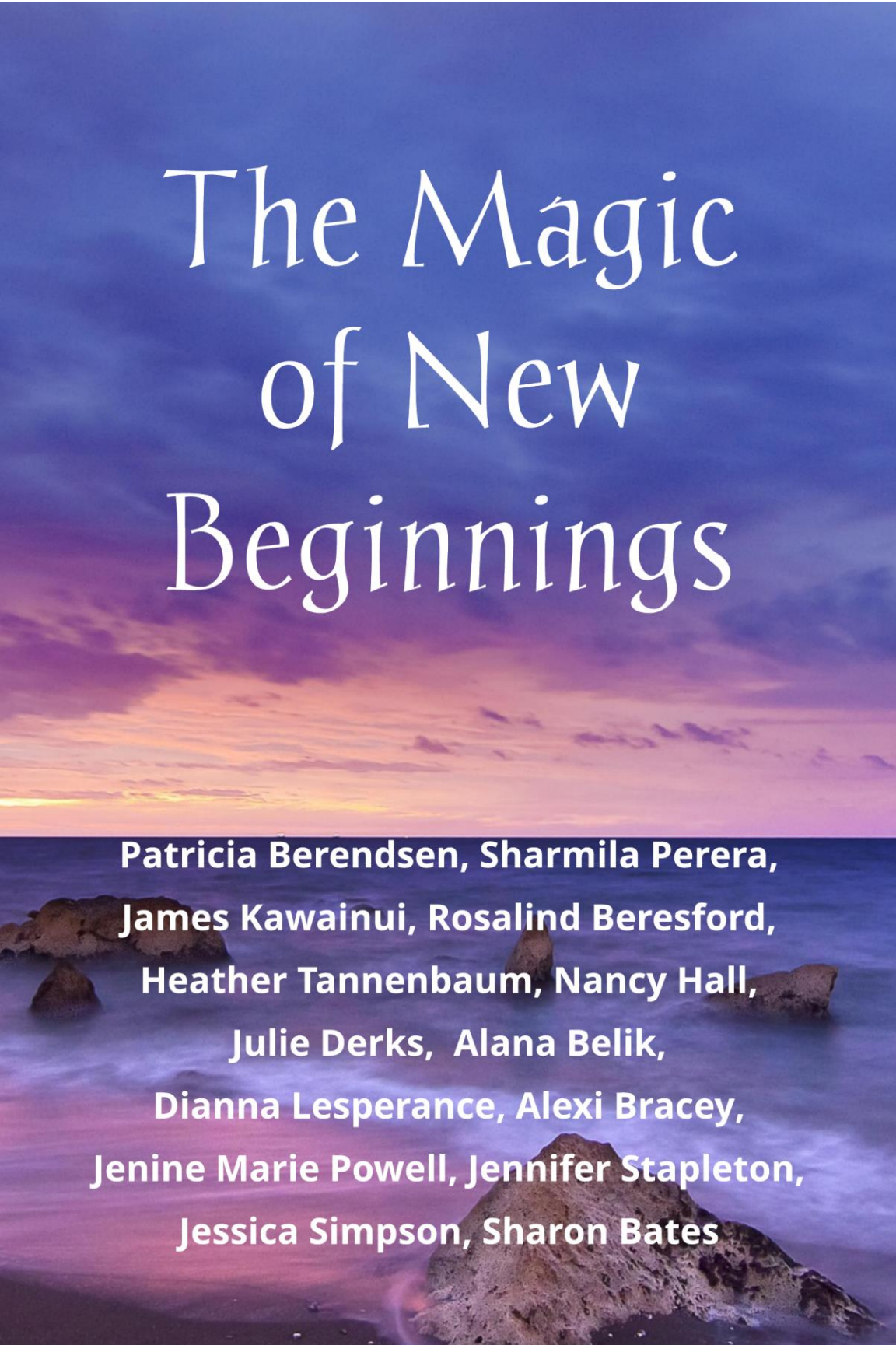

The Magic of New Beginnings
Patricia Berendsen, Sharmila Perera,
James Kawainui, Rosalind Beresford,
Heather Tannenbaum, Nancy Hall,
Julie Derks, Alana Belik,
Dianna Lesperance, Alexi Bracey,
Jenine Marie Powell, Jennifer Stapleton,
Jessica Simpson, Sharon Bates

The Magic of New Beginnings

A Beautiful Life Books

The Magic of New Beginnings
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1
The Ending That Sparked My New Beginning

Heather Tannenbaum

I, like so many others, found myself utterly lost when I got divorced. Any jolt to our everyday existence can lead to a crossroads where we're left with no choice but to hit the "refresh" button on our own lives and decide who and what we want for ourselves. For me, this came with my divorce.

I was a stay-at-home mom. We could afford to be a single-income family, which allowed me to volunteer at my kids' school, meet friends for coffee during the day and run my kids around to all their appointments, playdates and activities. Life as I knew it changed when I got divorced. I had to create my new beginning, but how? I got married when I was in my 20s and after 14 years and 2 young children, I had to figure out **who I was**, **who I wanted to be** and **how I was going to get there**. And oh yeah, I also had to figure out how to divorce a divorce lawyer, but that's not a story for these pages.

My husband and I both did our best to stay married, but our differences prevented us from bringing out the best in each other. With no real sense of who I was or where this journey would take me, I set out rather blindly, on my own path to figure it out; to figure *me* out. Don't be fooled by this oversimplified description of the process…figuring out who you are can be challenging, frustrating, discouraging and frightening; and for some, never achieved. It requires you to dig deep into your soul and maybe acknowledge some unflattering things and learn how to accept those things. When done genuinely, this is an ongoing process that can be immensely rewarding, empowering and eye-opening. What was my best self? What did I want personally? Who was I? What did I want professionally? What was I capable of doing and what wasn't I? What was I prepared to do and what wasn't I?

Where My Journey Led

Journaling was a significant part of my process which I will address later on, but suffice it to say that the more I shared my story on paper, the clearer my journey became. After many rewrites, modifications, and edits of my journal entries, and with much support and guidance, I turned my journals into a book. What began as the private thoughts of a highly emotional divorcing woman, underwent a makeover to become a piece of literature that could be a resource for others. I self-published the book and began promoting it by handing out free copies. As it turned out, my book became the key to unlocking that missing piece in my journey…how to help people in a more formal and professional way; something I found I love doing, and I wanted to do on a larger scale. The book was the first step in helping me accomplish this.

While promoting my book, I met a family law lawyer. After speaking to her about my book and giving her a copy, she reached out to express how much she appreciated my perspective and thought that I would be a great Divorce Coach.

Divorce Coach? It sounded great, but I didn't really know what that was. I hadn't been aware that such a role even existed. Maybe this was the platform I was looking for, from which to launch the next stage of my journey. I eagerly began researching, learning all I could about this profession and determining whether it was a realistic and feasible option for me. The more I learned, the more I was drawn to it. The girl who used to be paralyzed by self-doubt and lacked her own identity was now without hesitation, enrolling in a Divorce Coaching certification program. There was a name for what I wanted to do! I embraced this opportunity and loved every minute of my training. I couldn't wait to dive in!

In reality, starting my practice wasn't as easy as it had seemed in theory, but what is? One of the biggest challenges I faced was making people aware that Divorce Coaching existed. This remains a challenge, as it is a relatively new profession. Just as I had initially reacted when that family law lawyer (to whom I will be eternally grateful) suggested Divorce Coaching, was exactly

the reaction I was receiving from others. I still do. Social change has brought a more accepting view of divorce, and a more collaborative and amicable approach to it. We are encouraged to see divorce as a shift in family dynamics rather than the creation of a "broken home". Lengthy, expensive and often ugly battles are now seen as a last resort, paving the way for several methods of alternative dispute resolution whereby collaboration and cooperation are highly favored. This leaves divorcing couples with so many options to work out their issues outside of court and I work with my clients on finding the right choices for them. We also work together to take the emotion out of their decision-making, so that they're better equipped to make sound decisions for their future and their family's future.

When going through a divorce, I strongly recommend that you find a lawyer who specializes in family law. When used properly, your lawyer is a valuable member of your divorce team. So how do you use your lawyer properly? You should use him/her for points of law, legal strategy, and to advise you on your legal rights and obligations. I help my clients prepare for their meetings and do some of the background prep work with them, therefore saving them time, money and stress. When you're better prepared for meetings with the professionals, the process tends to go smoother.

I am able to point my clients in the right direction when it comes to finding the right professionals for their particular situations and ensuring that they're spending their resources wisely. Resources refer not only to financial, but emotional and physical as well. Spending our energy wisely; choosing our battles (so to speak), and putting our time and effort into those things that serve us well, are valuable tools when going through such a difficult time and preparing oneself for a new beginning.

I feel very good about being able to help my clients navigate through the overwhelming process of divorce and help them find the clarity, perspective and acceptance they need to move towards the next chapter of their life.

I see clients every day, who are faced with the scary and exciting task of rebuilding their lives and themselves. Essentially, they are seeking the tools and strategies to start their new beginning and rewrite their happily ever after.

Who I Was

If I'm being completely honest (which is of course the point here), I don't think I even had a true sense of myself when I got married. Over time my sense of self was so depleted, I felt almost paralyzed and suffocated by self-doubt. The only person preventing me from finding myself was me.

I wanted to be a good mom, and I knew that I was, but my life had to extend beyond my kids. I had allowed myself to get lost in my kids. They consumed me and my existence became totally absorbed by, and intertwined with theirs; they were my everything at the cost of anything else, including my marriage, it seemed. This was a humbling realization. Being a present and attentive mom was important to me but being a balanced mom is much healthier for everyone. You can still be present in your children's lives without physically being with them ALL -THE-TIME. In the beginning, it was so difficult for me to be away from my children (it was harder on me than on them) and I knew that I needed to find myself again. Who did I want to be?

Who I Wanted To Be

It took me some time to acknowledge and realize that I could still be a good mom while also being an actual person. I began to seek answers to this question in the only way I knew how…through writing. I sat down with my laptop and began journaling my thoughts and feelings. Whenever my kids would go to their dad's house, I would pour myself a smallish glass of wine, sit down and just write. It wasn't always pretty, and it wasn't always prolific but it was always purposeful and productive. While I may have written with a bit of wine, when I eventually made the decision to publish it into a book, I assure you there was no wine involved in the editing process!

As time passed, I became aware that more and more people in my social circles were getting divorced. I suppose my personal experience made it easier for others to confide in me about either their divorce or their contemplation with the prospect of it. I would meet friends, acquaintances or friends of acquaintances for coffee and I would listen and hear their worries, struggles, fears and uncertainties. It became quite clear to me, that while everyone's situation and circumstances differed, the common threat was fear of change; fear of the unknown and fear of starting over. I loved being able to help people. Selfishly, it also helped me understand myself and the role I played in the breakdown of my own relationship.

I would share with them some of the outlooks that I had come to see; what it was like on the other side of divorce. Many wanted assurances that happiness was possible. They wanted to know that they could rewrite their happily ever after. Let's start by acknowledging that happiness is a choice. Somewhere along the way, I had begun to appreciate that my divorce was really an opportunity for me to create the version of myself that I wanted to be. They wanted to find this too. I was so grateful that people were trusting me with these really private thoughts and feelings without even really knowing me in many cases. I suppose sometimes that makes it easier. It may sound self-serving, but helping others helped to feed my soul; it validated me and on the days when I needed it most, helping others forced me to remember how far I had come and that having off days is all part of the process. I found strength in helping others and I wanted to find a way to actually do this on a more formal, and regular basis.

Tips to Discovering You

1. **Feel What You Feel**

   In order to heal and grow from grief, we must give ourselves permission to go through all the feelings that will get us through it. Everyone has their own recipe for this. We have to allow ourselves to be sad, mad, angry, hurt, scared, broken and whatever else your recipe requires you to throw into the pot. Throw them in and allow them to simmer. While taking

the time and effort to acknowledge them, own them, respect them and then…release them.

Find a symbolic way to engage in this process to take it from an abstract idea or concept, to a more tangible action. Some people write down their feelings and then release them by burning the pages or shredding them. For those who don't want to write, speak. You can verbalize your feelings in an audio journal which is quite easy, thanks to smartphones. One option for releasing it is to delete them when you're ready. Find what works for you. It's important to find a positive outlet for your feelings.

Spend some time seeking strength from others. Listen to podcasts, read books or engage in soul-nurturing activities that help you to validate your feelings and accept the change you're embarking upon. Others can lift you when you need but this isn't enough. Ultimately the strength comes from within you and this is what will empower you to walk into your new beginning feeling ready, strong and open.

2. Who Do You Want To Be?

Your answer to this question becomes your goal. When making decisions, ask yourself if your decision is in line with your goal. If it is, do it. If it isn't, don't. How will your actions move you a step closer towards your goal? This is one of the early exercises I do with my clients. Your goals will also change along the way. This is an ever-evolving process.

Often clients come to me to help them navigate their divorce, but they also feel lost and unsure of who they are. I have found it very effective in my practice to work with clients on a series of Best Self exercises, to help them discover who they are and who they want to be. Understanding your best self allows you to set those goals in order to clarify your path to reaching the person you want to be. While these exercises can be challenging, there is value in them, and my clients are grateful for the perspective with which these exercises provide.

3. Journal

Journaling can be quite an effective tool to help you recognize, acknowledge and understand your feelings. As referenced earlier, it helped me immeasurably in those early months of separation when the emotional wreckage from my marital explosion was still so fresh and raw.

Over time, I noticed that my journal entries began to transform. My pages were no longer filled with the same sad or scared tone that they had taken in earlier days. Some days the tone was distinctively angry. Some days it was joyful and positive. Some days there was even a hint of pride woven in my words; pride for accomplishing a goal I had set for myself (albeit it, these goals may have been small). The power of journaling lies in your willingness to allow your emotions to honestly and freely pour out onto the pages. Journaling provides a private way to find clarity. This clarity can help you map out a rough blueprint for your journey of self-discovery. The key is complete honesty and transparency with yourself.

4. Choose To Let Go

Learning to let go of the things we can't change doesn't come easily. It requires a lot of acceptance and forgiveness of self and others. Acceptance isn't just a word or a concept; it's a challenging process. If something is out of your control, let it go.

Choose to focus on the positive and make a conscious effort to let go of the negative. Spend time nurturing the things that feed you and the things that allow you to move forward. Marc Chernoff writes about things happening *for* you rather than happening *to* you. This is an important distinction because it helps reframe your thoughts to a positive perspective rather than a negative one.

Marc and Angel Chernoff write a blog called Hack Life, which is where I saw this concept of accepting that things happen *for* you rather than *to* you. It was one short line that I read, but it was so impactful for me, that it helped change my perspective and it sums up beautifully, the concept of control and choice.

Another early exercise I often do with my clients is to have them keep a "small things" gratitude journal. This involves writing down at the end of each day, three things that happened that day that you're grateful for. These can't be big things like a roof over your head or food on the table. This exercise is specifically designed to focus on the small blessings that are often overlooked. For example, "I'm grateful that the line at the drive-thru wasn't long when I got there, so I got to work on time", or "I'm grateful that nobody complained about their dinner tonight".

This exercise helps shift your perspective. When you know that you have to record three good things, you're more apt to look for them, forcing your mind to look for the positive in any situation.

5. Redefine Relationships and Set Boundaries

How will your new beginning change your existing relationships? Some relationships may require some tweaking and transformation. Sometimes you may choose to abandon a relationship that is unhealthy or limits you. In my work, for example, my clients have to learn to transition into a co-parenting relationship, which is very different from parenting with a life partner or spouse.

This new beginning is also a difficult one. Imagine that two sheets of paper have been glued together for years. The glue has dried and the papers have functioned as one. The process of separating them can be messy. I help my clients find an effective and emotionally detached way to communicate with their ex or soon-to-be ex. Shifting one's mindset to think of a former spouse as a colleague can be challenging. Turning off our emotions isn't as easy as flipping a switch. There are setbacks, slip-ups, missteps, and misunderstandings. It helps to acknowledge that this is no longer an emotional relationship, but rather more of a business relationship that strictly revolves around the best interests of their children.

This can be a frustrating process because we're not always afforded the luxury of a clean break where we get to close one door and just waltz through a new one. We have to clean up our mess and that can involve making people see us

differently. If we want people to see us and treat us differently, then it is incumbent upon us to lead the way by demanding this of ourselves. We have to change our inner dialogue to see and treat ourselves differently. The change starts with us. Work from the inside out. We set the tone and over time people will pick up on our cues. Want better. Demand better. This is how we establish the foundation upon which new boundaries are set.

6. Try Something New

Why not step out of your comfort zone and try something new? Be open to new experiences. Is there something that you've always wanted to try but haven't? This may be an opportune time to give it a shot. Trying something new doesn't have to be drastic. If you've always wanted to try an art class, do it. If taking up a sport has been something you pushed to the side, why not try it now? Opening up your mind to the possibilities allows you to grow and discover new things about yourself. Trying something new can also provide you with opportunities to meet new people outside of your current network. Challenge yourself to try one new thing or to reacquaint yourself with something that you may have stopped doing or lost interest in.

7. Celebrate The Small Stuff

We have to learn to walk before we can run. When we're embarking upon a new beginning, we're naturally tempted to want to make drastic changes, leading us to set unrealistic goals. When we don't achieve these goals, it can wreak havoc on our self-esteem. Instead, focus on small changes.

Start for example, with setting your alarm 10 minutes earlier and meditating before starting your day. This is a small, but very impactful step to changing your mindset. If you've been putting off the mountain of laundry piling up, do a load and reward yourself with something that makes you happy. This is a great way to add something you have to do, with something you want to do and it allows you to celebrate your

accomplishment. As time goes on, build on these goals and before you know it, you've reframed your attitude. You can proceed with positivity and productivity.

8. Be Kind To Yourself

Not every day will be easy. Not every choice we make will be a good one. We're human and we make mistakes. We suffer missteps and setbacks. This is all part of the process. When we stumble, it's important to treat ourselves with compassion. Don't be too hard on yourself and don't beat yourself down for it. Pick yourself up, brush yourself off, reflect on what happened and carry on knowing that we're never defined by just one choice. You have the opportunity to choose differently next time.

Final Thoughts

Change is inevitable and scary but also very exciting. For changes in your life to be positive, you have to be the architect of your life and actively design the life you want through your choices. Nobody can write your story for you. Allow the empowerment of this to override the overwhelm of it all.

Wishing for things to be different or better doesn't make them so. Life is too short to not be happy, but recognize that YOU have to make the choice to be happy. YOU have the power to choose and YOU hold the power to change.

It requires bravery, strength, and work but if you're committed to the process of change, you can achieve the happiness you seek on your own terms and you can step into your new beginning ready to embrace the opportunities that lie ahead.



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2

Hello and Goodbye: Embracing the Changing Seasons of Our Lives

Patricia Berendsen

Hello

Life is a series of beginnings and endings, sequences of hellos and goodbyes. For many of us, we may have mixed feelings about change. As creatures of habit, we may want things to stay the same. For some of us, new beginnings are filled with anxiety and dread because we want to remain comfortable. Or we may welcome an adventure because we like the stimulation and challenge of something new. Regardless of our level of comfort or discomfort, change is something we will navigate our entire lives. “Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.” (Roman philosopher, Lucius Annaeus Seneca the Younger)

Transitions and Change

The thing about transitions, or “hellos and goodbyes” is that they tend to be destabilizing. We may feel like our feet are not on solid ground or we might feel a bit insecure, or we may feel overwhelmed. On the other hand, we may be excited, enthusiastically greeting a new start with passion and lots of energy. Either way, it is important for us to find ways to navigate these feeling states so that we can move from one to the other with relative ease. As author Paulo Coelho shares, “If you're brave enough to say goodbye, life will reward you with a new hello.”

We can take our learnings about beginnings and endings from the cyclical seasons of nature. Each season has its time and purpose. Spring, summer, fall, and winter have a series of comings and goings. Winter’s snow gives way to watering the earth so that flowers and trees can bloom in spring. Spring’s warmer weather encourages

crocuses to miraculously poke their heads out from the previously frozen ground. Their "blossom-span" is limited, and it gives way to summer flowers as warmth dries the moisture of the ground. The heat of summer evolves toward lower temperatures in the fall. The frost signals that summer is ending. Maple trees sense the changes. Progressively their leaves turn from a luscious green to a feast for the eyes, an array of yellows, reds, and golds. Following their display of colour, they begin the process of releasing their leaves to the ground from which they grew. Trees get ready for the dead of winter, appearing naked to the eye, yet ever preparing for the next season of rebirth. As human members of the ecosystem, we cannot escape or fast forward through the inevitability of the many seasons in our lifetime. Both the good and the not-so-good will morph and merge with the ebb and flow of our life. We can hold on to the hope and be reassured that whatever we are going through will pass.

A renowned sacred Christian text states that:

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace."

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Outside of our Comfort Zone

What I have learned is that life is anything but comfortable! From the time we are born we are continually taken out of our comfort zone. When I observe babies engage with the world, practically everything is outside of their comfort zone. Learning to recognize voices, beginning

to understand that their hands and legs and feet are connected to themselves, being able to roll over, to talk and walk, just to name a few, takes great effort and lots of repetition. These discoveries are not necessarily comfortable. Infants need to practise the same thing over and over again to gain mastery. Have you ever seen a child learn to walk without falling numerous times? The difference between infants and adults is that adults can get discouraged easily and quit, but nurtured babies keep at it. They try and try again with their efforts punctuated with breaks in between their learning. And when they do get it, they exhibit surprise followed by huge smiles, glee, and pride. As adults, we seem to lose our childlike sense of wonder, curiosity, and persistence when things get tough. However, we can learn from infants and rediscover the necessary skills of being in the moment, not giving up and finding joy in repetition.

"Normal" Doesn't Mean Easy

Many of our developmental milestones contain beginnings and endings. Just because these markers are "normal" or "expected" doesn't mean that navigating them is easy. For instance, new couples who are having a baby need to say goodbye to being two people who can devote their time and attention to each other exclusively. They also say hello to the unknown territory of becoming parents. When their child goes to daycare or school for the first time, it's an ending of being the most influential caregiver. It means letting go. For the child, it may be a loss of having unfettered access to their parents or caregivers. At the same time, it could be a new beginning for the little one, perhaps making new friends or learning something new. Parents may welcome a hello to more freedom and time for themselves.

Even Students Get Anxious About Hello's and Goodbyes

In my mental health counselling practice, I often hear students' stories of their anxiety about graduation. For elementary school-age graduates, they are saying hello to high school. Hello to unfamiliar teachers, new friends, and a larger student population while saying goodbye to their seniority. It's not easy transitioning from "the top" privileged position in elementary school to the "bottom" as one starts high school. For those leaving high school, there is anxiety about next steps. College? University? Which one? Working instead of post-secondary education? Will we remain high school sweethearts?

Hello and Goodbye to Relationships

Another common experience of hello and goodbye is the beginning and ending of a relationship. In my role as a Couple and Relationship Therapist, I observe that couples typically have a lot of beginnings and endings that occur prior to the official dissolution of their relationship. Hellos may have initially involved that butterfly feeling in your stomach, constantly thinking about your sweetheart, hours of talking on the phone, physical affection, and long walks. There is a saying, "begin with the end in mind". However, in my almost 30 years of clinical practice, I have not met anyone who got married hoping and intending to separate and divorce down the road. When ending a relationship, goodbyes may include grief, loss and trauma related to a messy separation, an affair, confused and distraught children or pets, family violence, interpersonal tension with an ex, legal proceedings, and a change in a standard of living.

Following the termination of a relationship there may be a hello to a new love interest. We might eagerly greet this opportunity with our intention "to get it right". More often than not, we will say hello to our emotional baggage (that we didn't know we had), stepchildren and extended families, new identities, moving to a new home, going to a new school, and custody arrangements.

Chosen versus Forced Hello's and Goodbyes

Some beginnings and endings are chosen while others are put upon us. Motor vehicle accidents, chronic illness, or being laid off are not circumstances we would choose. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer at the beginning of the pandemic, I did not want to say hello to this experience. I just wanted to say goodbye to cancer as quickly as possible. Instead, I said hello to numerous medical appointments, two surgeries, ongoing fatigue, depression and anxiety, unending nerve pain and intensive radiation. I said goodbye to working for almost a year.**

Another Forced Hello and Goodbye

Recently a very dear friend of mine sold his family home so that he and his wife could be free to have more time as a family, to travel and homeschool their two children while embarking on adventures together. They decided that their first family trip would be to a sunny and warm destination. They frequented the beach as a family almost daily, intent on swimming, surfing, and taking in the sun. On this weekday out of the

blue, their eldest son who was playing in the water, suddenly appeared to be in trouble. Upon hearing cries for help, his father immediately bolted into the water. Miraculously, he was able to rescue his son. But the riptide was too strong, and, in the process of saving his son, he was swallowed up by the unpredictable and powerful currents of the ocean. My friend, Rick, lost his life. A devastating and unwanted goodbye for his wife and two boys was thrust upon them. They did not choose this.

My friend's wife, now a widow, is reluctantly learning to say hello to the journey of being a sole grieving parent to her sons who are also dealing with their unique experiences of loss. I remember getting the phone call about Rick's tragic death. Unbeknownst to me, on the day before he died, I had texted him to see how his trip was going. It was unusual for him to take a day to respond. I chalked it up to being busy having a good time. I had no idea that something catastrophic had transpired. But once I heard the heart-wrenching words on the phone that he had died, I, too, as his friend, was pushed into saying hello to deep grief, gathering precious memories, and saying goodbye to our friendship as I had known it. Author Moira Rogers says it best: "The two hardest things to say in life is hello for the first time and goodbye for the last."

Tips for Dealing with Hello's and Goodbyes

The B E G I N and E N D acronyms have some important tips to help with saying hello and goodbye, no matter what stage of life you are in.

B E G I N

1. **Be in the moment.** Dwelling on the past or anticipating the future often overwhelms us. When we focus on the past or the future, the task or challenge at hand will tend to appear bigger than it really is. Keep putting one foot in front of the other.

2. **Easy does it.** Don't be so hard on yourself. It is natural to feel a bit "wobbly" when we are experiencing something new.

3. **Go with the flow.** Resisting what is *actually happening* will only serve to stress you out more. "Digging in our heels" only makes what we get to do more difficult.

4. **Imagine your future self** once the beginning has settled or picture your future self when you have mastered your craft.

5. **Nudge yourself ever so gently to do a little something each day.** It could be taking a shower, complimenting a grocery clerk, working on a puzzle, or going for a walk.

E N D

1. **Empower yourself to take the time you need to deal with an ending.** Easy does it. This bears repeating. This is not the time to be hard on yourself.

2. **Nourish yourself** with people, activities, and things that bring you pleasure, or at least put a smile on your face. Above all, never give up. Remember that an ending means a new beginning is just around the corner. "This too shall pass."

3. **Do allow for time to grieve or celebrate endings.** Sometimes we can tell ourselves that, "I feel like a loser to be sad about _____. It's not that bad." Dare to let yourself feel what you feel without judging the heck out of yourself. Allow yourself to experience joy/pain. Most beginnings and endings involve both joy and pain.

Goodbye

So much can happen during transitions. In the journey between hello and goodbye, we can get stuck in the struggle to want everything settled—now! We may feel untethered, sad, and scattered, and find these states difficult to tolerate. Uncertainty, self-doubt, and fear often take centre stage. Acknowledging these feeling states is part of courageously moving forward. Preparing for transitions, taking time amidst life's changes, and slowing down the pace of our lives will support our integration of change. I cannot recall where I heard this saying, and I love it, "there is so much life to live in the "in-between". Yet for most of us, the "in-between" part is one of the most intimidating and unsettling places to live!

**PS. I am doing well and am cancer free.

Resources

I came across a beautiful children's book, **Goodbye Friend, Hello Friend** by Cori Doerrfeld (2019), New York: Dial books for young readers; Penguin Random House. The simplicity of children's books is helpful for adults (not just children) to read. Refreshingly, they often get to the heart of topics directly and clearly.

The **Feeling and Sensation Vocabulary Lists** are not complete lists. They do, however, give you a starting place to name some feelings (emotions) and the sensations you may feel in your body.

FEELING VOCABULARY

Angry
aggravated
annoyed
defiant
disgusted
enraged
exasperated
frustrated
furious
hateful
hostile
indignant
infuriated
mad
obstinate
outraged
perturbed
peeved
pissed off
rebellious
seething
spiteful
surly
upset
vengeful

Ashamed
apologetic
embarrassed
foolish
guilty
hopeful
inspired
keen
optimistic
powerful
productive
strong
sure
trusting

Confused
baffled
befuddled
bewildered
disoriented
flustered
perplexed
puzzled
scattered
troubled
unfocused

Happy
amused
cheerful
delighted
ecstatic
elated
excited
exuberant
gleeful
mournful
sorrowful
rejected
resentful

Loving
affectionate
aroused
caring
devoted
intimate
tender
warm

Sad
despondent
depressed
dismal
low
melancholy
miserable
unhappy
weepy

Satisfied
adequate
content
mellow
peaceful
pleased

Surprised
aghast
amazed
astonished
astounded
incredulous
shocked
startled

Thankful
appreciative
grateful
gratified
indebted
obliged
relieved

Thoughtful
challenged
curious
illuminated
informed
interested
pensive
reflective

Uncertain
cynical
doubtful
dubious
distrustful
lethargic
lazy
tired
unmotivated
nonchalant
occupied
selfish
unconcerned

Wanting
empty
envious
homesick
hungry
ignored
jealous
lonely
longing
lustful

Weak
inadequate
burdened
controlled
despairing
discouraged
helpless
hopeless
impotent
inhibited
lost

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Sensation Vocabulary

Twitch dull sharp achy smooth jagged

Frozen airy thick trembly shivery chills

Vibration itchy intense mild numb flaccid

Blocked moving congested expanding tight puffy

Bubbly tingly shaky paralyzed sweaty moist

Clammy jumbly frantic energized stringy damp

Electric fluid light fuzzy dense cool

Throbbing faint strong pulsing constricting warm

Radiating shudder bloated flushed prickly buzzy

Flutter pressure jumpy tense wobbly

Nauseous spinning dizzy tremulous breathless quake

Quivery suffocating pounding heavy spasming furry

Goose-bumps tight skin

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3

Life is an Adventure

Sharmila Perera

The Magic of New Beginnings

We all wish life was a fairy tale full of magical moments. For some, it is, and for others it is not. As for me, I made a choice. My life will be magical no matter what the circumstances are! I chose that every new beginning good or bad will lead to a better tomorrow. I chose strength, I chose resilience, I chose not to feel sorry for myself and most of all I chose to wear rose tinted glasses whenever life got too hard.

My life has taken me through so many new beginnings. Drastic and consistent changes in one's life can be difficult. I've learned that embracing it rather than repelling it, seeing the best of it rather than the worst of it, seeing opportunity rather than the difficulties is the only way to see the magic every change can create in your life. My secret is wearing rose tinted glasses. Imaginary or not, rose tinted glasses makes the world beautiful and magical and I wear them all the time – literally! It changes my outlook on places, people, and things from being ugly or unbearable to being beautiful.

Until the age of 20 my life was kept constant and structured by my parents. They kept me safe and grounded even through the turmoil and unrest due to the civil war around us. I grew up in a war torn, third world country but had everything I wanted and needed. A loving family, wonderful friends, and a beautiful home. My family was considered to be rich and influential in our society and my parents took care of everything, enveloping me with love and security. My life as I knew it, was steady and blissful.

Everything changed when I fell in love with a boy that my parents did not approve of. I wanted to get married, and my parents forbade it. Our community was somewhat traditional where children did as their parents wanted. Parents most often chose the career for their children as well as their partners. Love marriages were not discouraged but it was vital to choose a partner that parents approved of. At age 21 I decided to take matters into my own hands and ran away from home with the love of my life. Before I knew it, I was pregnant! We were young and broke with a child on the way. My parents planned to send us off to the USA because they thought it would be the best option for our future. There I was, alone and scared and the only thing that kept me going was the thought of the magic of the little life growing inside of me. I went from having everything one could desire, to a life where I lived with basic hand me downs in an apartment as big as a shoe box while we struggled to put food on the table. I had nothing but everything because the only 2 things that mattered to me most was my husband, and my baby.

From there began my journey of new beginnings where every time I believed that life was getting to be constant, another change was thrown my way. Change has become so much a part of my life that I now believe that without it, my life would be boring.

After I had my beautiful baby boy we went back to Sri Lanka and soon we had 2 more children, beautiful baby girls. My father insisted that I complete my undergraduate studies, so I went to school even while pregnant and breastfeeding. I am grateful that he pushed me into doing so because I earned my degree. The situation with the war was becoming dreadful, and we were living in constant fear for the safety of our family. After escaping a bomb attack, we decided it was time to make changes and look for options. My husband's brother had immigrated to Canada the year before and encouraged us to apply as well. Without much thought we secured a lawyer who represented us and within 8 short months we were provided with permanent residency in Canada. Looking back this was an even bigger change and challenge than the first time we went out of Sri Lanka. Here we were 32 years old, with 3 kids, the youngest being only 1 year old. I had little to no work experience landing in Canada, with no job and savings of just $10,000. New beginnings, but definitely not magical at that time. However, looking back this was the best new beginning life could have thrown our way.

My husband took a factory job to make ends meet. No one would give me a job. To gain some experience and get a foot in the door I decided to

volunteer at a law firm that kept me working most nights till well after 7 pm. My older kids looked after my little girl when my husband needed to work evenings or the night shift. I was over worked and not paid. In despair I approached the lawyer who had represented us in our immigration application for a job. She provided me the opportunity to freelance. My job was to market Immigration services in Sri Lanka and bring in clients. I knew nothing about immigration laws or sales, and it was way out of my comfort level. But desperation makes you tough. I knew I had to take up this challenge and I did so, little knowing that this would be the turning point in my life.

After 2 years of working for the law firm, studying, and obtaining the necessary certifications, licenses, and knowledge, I made a conscious decision to change my life. Looking towards another a new beginning I embarked on my entrepreneurial journey to set up my own immigration practice. I decided to make my own rules and decisions and be responsible for my own destiny. "Ann Arbour Consultants Inc.," was born, where its mission was not just to provide opportunities for people in every corner of the world to make Canada their home, but also to bring people to Canada that would be a great asset to Canadian employers and to the economy as a whole. This conscious decision to change became the cornerstone of every magical new beginning in my life.

This new chapter was not just difficult, but gruelling at the best of times. It was challenging to market myself overseas and the only way to raise awareness for myself was to physically fly out to different countries to conduct seminars. I had to leave my young children at home with my husband for many weeks. This was the hardest part of it all. It was not just about missing them that made it hard but more, the guilt I felt of leaving them for long periods of time.

Dealing with clients from different parts of the world meant that I was constantly working around the clock. For many years my schedule when in Canada was to wake up early, make breakfast, get the kids to school, work until 3 pm, get the kids from school, make time for the kids and their many activities, get dinner ready, put kids to bed and work till 2 am. Weekends consisted of waking early, doing more work, outings with the family during the day, cooking, cleaning, and more work till late at night. When I needed to travel, I did the groceries, cooked and froze meals, organized the kids' activities, travelled through 3 to 4 time zones in a two week period and came back exhausted, but to a house full of obligations and more business to work on. I survived on 4 hours of sleep and

adrenaline for many years. To the outside world my life was one that everyone wanted. I travelled to exotic destinations, worked at my own schedule, did a fulfilling job that I loved and made money in the process. The difficulties were known only to me. I had sleepless nights lying awake solving problems in my head and chasing demons. I gained weight from stress and constant travel, and I encountered several health issues because I didn't have time to look after myself. Every waking moment was spent looking after my business or my family. I reminded myself to look at difficulties as opportunities. I wore my rose-tinted glasses and counted my blessings.

Entering the world of Immigration, I didn't realize how often rules and regulations of Immigration changed based on government policies and decisions. I was caught unaware of the need to be prepared to change gears with little to no warning of changes that are issued by governments. I had instances where the most profitable areas of my immigration practice were totally shut down for many months making my business vulnerable to bankruptcy. Through the years I learned to be flexible, think on my feet and to be open to every change thrown my way. I looked at changes as opportunities for new beginnings, created reserves for unexpected changes, and diversified my practice. I stayed open to new adventures, trusted in myself, and surrounded myself with like-minded people. Within the first 10 years, I moved my basement office into an office in Toronto, opened a second office in Alberta and set up global offices and representation in Sri Lanka, Dubai, many cities in India, Bangladesh, Bermuda, Mexico, and the Caribbean. I was on fire!

When I started the business, I was taught traditional methods of conducting business. This consisted of writing a business plan and following it, keeping an eye on the competition and knowing what they were doing, not giving away my best contacts, not helping my competition, and ensuring I have strict rules and regulations that all employees must follow. None of this worked. Therefore, I decided to make my own rules. I tossed out all my business plans since it did not seem to work in my field and conditioned my mind to set plans that would adapt to quick changes. I knew where I wanted to go and where I wanted to be so not having a set business plan helped me maintain a very flexible attitude towards change. I didn't know what or who my competition was, and I didn't care. I realized that in following my competition and watching what they did made me a follower. Instead, I got into a head space of quiet wonder that always made me think about exciting new things. I wanted to be a leader not a follower of my competition. I wanted

to be innovative and look for new possibilities and that no one else thought of. Keeping an eye on the competition in itself, was a stressful and time-consuming job. So, I did what I do best, I put on my rose-tinted glasses and looked for the beauty in all possibilities and collaborations for new ventures even with competitors. My business has gone through many new beginnings and each time I am struck down I have managed to get up, get going and leap forward into greater success.

I set up Ann Arbour Consultants Inc., based on the 3 "C" pillars. Care, Compassion and Commitment. Focusing first on "care" and "compassion" within the company, we shared the workload, helped each other complete tasks and allowed flexible work hours and time off with a focus on "family comes first." Our work from home days were instituted years before Covid hit and has become a way of life at Ann Arbour. The care and compassion within the organization poured over to our clients, the immigrant, because we understood that they give up everything they know and love to start a new life in Canada, or worse still, flee from situations that are beyond comprehension to many of us. We personally get to know each of our clients, their family, their life, and their story. They are not just a file number. Our third "C" word, "Commitment", is our promise that we do everything within our power to ensure a successful application, issuance of visas and safe landing in Canada for each of our clients. We are also committed to the Canadian business owners who seek our assistance in filling positions within their company with foreign talent when they are unable to fill such positions with Canadians. We ensure to source only the best talent from across the world and successfully process all permits for both the employer and the employee to land in Canada as quickly as possible to fill the vacant position. With severe labour shortages across Canada immigration is at the forefront and by ensuring that employers have the right workers in their businesses helps the employer as well as the Canadian economy.

Just as life was settling down into being quite constant, it was turned upside down once again with yet another disruption, proving that my life is about changes and new beginnings. My kids had grown up and moved to new cities and new lives. My husband and I were entering into a space to embrace our new beginning of being empty nesters. Life threw a different curve ball at me. My mother was struck down with Parkinson's disease, had a fall and was declared to be bed ridden for life. Her wish was to live with me until she died and not be moved into a long-term care facility. Our home in the city was not set up to accommodate her disabilities. We decided to sell our home and move to the country where

we could buy a bigger place in a more serene area to accommodate my mother, my father, a caregiver, and my mom's disabilities.

I was a city person and unsure if I could adapt to a life in the country. We moved to a beautiful spot on the lake with everyone in tow. The next 3 years were a whirl wind, as my mother deteriorated before my eyes and while in her last days, she was kept alive, tube fed and on oxygen. I decided to keep her at home instead of at a hospice until she beathed her last. The emotional and physical stress of looking after a disabled and dying parent took a hard toll on me but a beautiful opportunity arose out of it. There were just not enough organizations that helped families like ours look after their aged and dying loved ones. There was a severe lack of support and knowledge on looking after a senior or a person with disabilities at home. I decided to set up "Stay Home Forever Inc.," a company dedicated to the care of the elderly and the disabled. In 3 years, the company grew from one location to 10 covering Toronto, GTA and its outskirts. Yes, another new beginning!

My decision to venture out on my own to set up Ann Arbour created a new beginning for myself and my family and has brought many blessings into my life. One being, financial prosperity, to look after not just my family but others in need, in different corners of the world. Another being to provide my knowledge and experience to assist others set up their own businesses. I feel blessed to be in a fulfilling career where every single day I provide an opportunity for a new beginning to another family, and a new beginning in Canada. It's beautiful to follow the life changing opportunities Canada has brought to so many thousands of people who we have assisted in the immigration process. It is also beautiful to know that the companies we assist with foreign talent has immensely benefited from these wonderful workers. My work takes me to many destinations around the world and this has opened my mind to the wonderous beauty of this diverse universe.

The accidental new beginnings that have been thrust into my life have taught me to embrace change with courage and to seek opportunity in every difficult situation. I learned to manage the stress of work and family. I learned that work time and family time does not always have to be separated and the more I tried to separate them the more difficult it became. Instead, I learned to blend them in. I took my family, when possible, on my travels, worked but also had fun with everyone. My family learned to understand that both aspects were important and necessary and learned to adapt and to see the advantages. I learned to let

go of the guilt of having to leave my young kids to travel and that taking some time off for myself to rest and rejuvenate is necessary. This benefits not just me, but my family and my business. I learned to be more assertive, to say no to things that don't serve me, and people that does not resonate with me, my family, and my beliefs. I learned that it's okay to not aways be in control and it is more than fine to let things unfold sometimes as they should. I learned that the most carefully laid out plans can get crushed very easily and take you down a totally new beginning and that's okay. I learned that it is not necessary to always be strong and sometimes everyone needs a shoulder to lean on. It is ok to cry to show your soft side and vulnerability. It is ok to just be me!!

My rose-tinted glasses help me see the good in all people, things, places, and situations. This has attracted so many more wonderful people and opportunities into my life and helped me embark on new ventures as well as kept me moving forward into greater heights year after year. writing this chapter has forced me to look back at my life more clearly and be grateful for all of the adventures that have come my way – good or bad!

New beginnings are sometimes like a prickly rose bush with no flowers. No beauty, just hurtful pricks. If you continue to nurture that bush it will sprout a beautiful, small, and closed rose bud one day. We can choose to pluck it out and throw it to the ground or nurture it. The choice is ours. If we choose to nurture it, very slowly each petal will unfold into a big, beautiful, full-blown rose. If lucky enough, it will have multiple colours. Just as much as it will bloom into its best and give you immense satisfaction, it will soon die out. It's time for a new bud to bloom. Keep nurturing the prickly bush and it will give you beautiful new rose buds year after year.

Life is an adventure full of opportunities and new beginnings. Embrace it!



Sharmila is a wife, mother, and entrepreneur. Being an immigrant herself, she is passionate about introducing Canada to those that seek a better life, safety or security, those that wish to further their career or business or to those that simply need a place to call home. Having immigrated at the age of 32 with 3 young children she describes herself as having been a naïve and unconfident person who had never worked prior to coming to Canada. 20 years later she runs a million-dollar company providing immigration consulting and foreign talent recruitment services to people located in every corner of the world through her multiple offices in Canada and abroad.

Sharmila also founded the Franchise Stay Home Forever Inc., in 2019, a home care company dedicated to providing care to seniors, persons with disabilities and to retirement and long-term care facilities. Stay Home Forever now operates out of 10 franchised locations in Ontario.

Her drive? Sharmila loves to make a difference in the lives of people every single day and fight for those that have no voice, be it immigrants or seniors. She gives people hope for a better tomorrow.

She is a recipient of a gold award for women entrepreneur of the year presented by Women in management and her business Ann Arbour Consultants Inc., was awarded the business excellence award for 2022 by the Ajax- Pickering Board of Trade. https://www.annarbour.com/

4

Reunion

Finding My Way Home to My Ancestors

James Kealiipiilani Kawainui

"You need to come home." I was on the phone with my mom, checking in to see how she was doing. *Nothing good could possibly come from a statement like that,* I said to myself. Dreadful thoughts instantly flooded my brain. Why do humans automatically default to the worst case scenario? *Is she sick? Is my dad unwell? Did something happen to one of my siblings? Somebody died?* Calming myself as best I could I asked, "What's happened?" "A woman knocked on my door a few months ago and asked me about Gramma. She said she's been researching her family genealogy and thinks we're related." I heard excitement in her voice, which was unusual. "She's pretty sure she and I are cousins and showed me a little of the work she's been doing. Gramma knew she'd been adopted and always wondered who her real family was." *Breathe James,* I thought to myself, *Everything's okay.*

"Diane, (the woman's name) is inviting us to a family reunion she's organizing. She's contacted over 600 other family members who said they were interested in coming. I think it's important that you're there because you're the oldest. (I had seven brothers and sisters) "I'll think about it," I said. It was the easiest way to avoid having to decide at that moment.

There was so much up in the air about my life that adding going home to the mix was more than I wanted to think about. I had been living in New Zealand for five years. The relationship that had taken me there in the first place had recently ended and I'd only just moved out and found a place to live. My healing practice was still in its infancy, and I was barely getting by on what I made from it.

I had a community of friends that were loving, supportive, and fun, something that had been missing when I lived in Hawaii. I was experiencing a sense of freedom I hadn't given myself permission to enjoy before and watching a more empowered version of myself emerge.

I was also spending more time with my mentor Lui[1] who had taken me under his wing and opened me up to a world I hadn't known existed and to a gift I didn't know I had. Lui was helping me overcome my fears and connect with my Kūpuna[2], while slowly learning to listen and trust their guidance, and use my gift to help people.

I have too much going on to go home right now.

My mom seldom asked for anything, my being there was important to her. I was conflicted and didn't know what to do. With all the changes in my life, I didn't have the time or space to go inside and seek the answers I was looking for. A friend I'd spoken to suggested I look at doing some kind of retreat to help me get clear. "Have you ever heard of Vipassana meditation?" they asked. I'd never heard of it and decided to do some research and get a little more information.

Vipassana[3] is one of the oldest forms of Buddhist meditation. The focus is on being able to observe oneself without judgment so you can see things as they really are through the calming of the mind and experiencing life in the present moment. It's commonly taught in a ten-day retreat with strict rules and guidelines designed so you can fully immerse yourself in their practices.

I wasn't sure about the process, but I was attracted to the ten days of silence and space. It's what I thought I needed. I reached out and spoke

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[1] Lui is a Māori Spiritual Healer and my first real teacher. I had been guided to look for him shortly after I'd arrived in New Zealand even though it took me a few years to finally find him.

[2] Kūpuna is the plural form of the Hawaiian word for ancestor and means, "From the ancestors". The singular form of kupuna which means ancestor or grandparent and is a word often used to describe an elder. It is a form of respect towards an elder of their age, knowledge, and wisdom.

[3] https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/what-is-vipassana/, https://tricycle.org/magazine/vipassana-meditation https://www.webmd.com/balance/what-is-vipassana-meditation

with one of the monks at the retreat center. “Is it true I have to let go of all my current practices when I come to the retreat?” I asked “Yes,” he said. “In order to learn our technique, we ask that you stop everything you were doing prior to coming. We want you to be able to stay in the moment and in the container, we create so you can begin to understand and practice our process.” *I’m not sure I’m ready to do everything you're asking,* I thought to myself. I thanked him for his time and asked him when the next class was.

I sat with what the monk said about their guidelines and letting go of all of my practices. I decided that if I attended the retreat, I would keep journaling and doing what Lui had taught me. *Who’s going to know?* The more I thought about it, the more I convinced myself that going was a good idea. *I can do this; I’ll just do it my way.*

I had less than a week before the retreat started and began preparing to leave. Sitting in my morning meditation a couple days before I was supposed to head out, I heard my Kūpuna*, “You're going into this retreat knowing about their rules but not willing to follow them. It's true, nobody will know what you’re doing but what does that say about you? Will you be in integrity with yourself if you’re not going to follow their guidelines?”*

Truth bomb! It didn’t matter that no one would know. What mattered was that I would know, and they (my Kūpuna) would know. A big part of the work I’d done with Lui, and a cornerstone of the Māori spiritual teachings he shared with me, was about living in harmony and integrity inside myself. We had looked at my life and how out of integrity I’d been living, and the consequences that had resulted because of my actions. *You know what you have to do James.*

I called the retreat center, thanked them, and told them I wasn’t coming. Still needing to take the time to decide if going home was a good idea or not, and having already blocked it off, I realized I needed to come up with an alternative. I rang my friend who had suggested to check out the retreat and told her what had happened in my meditation. “I don’t know what to do now that I’ve decided not to go,” I said. She thought for a moment before saying, “I have an idea! Remember the cabin we stayed at a few months back? You could go there. My cousin said I was welcome to use it if no one else was. Let me ring and see if they’d let you use it.” Not long after my phone rang. “The cabin’s yours,” she said. “Awesome! When can I come by and get the keys?”

A few days later I arrived at the cabin and settled in. I had the next five days to myself. I was stocked up and wouldn't have to leave. Not sure of what was going to happen I did my best to let go and just give myself permission to be. The first day passed uneventfully and I'd found a rhythm that felt good.

On the second day my perfectionist mind got impatient, swooped in, and took control. *This is not happening fast enough!* It was trying to create the perfect scenario, become the perfect meditator, and be perfectly quiet. *Should I sit or lie down? Would it be better on the porch or in the living room? Go for a walk or listen to music? Take a break or just plow through it? Why is there no tv in this place??* I was so attached to getting the right answer that I drove myself crazy. I meditated for hours at a time, forcing myself to sit still. I kept asking the question and waiting for an answer … but nothing happened.

Instead of getting quiet, my mind got even louder, and I kept feeling more and more out of control. I was wallowing in self-judgment and doubt. It was frustrating the hell out of me. *I must be doing something wrong!* I could feel myself dropping into that familiar downward spiral when things got challenging. As a reflection to my darkening mood, it started raining. *Just F'ing great!* Now I was cold and miserable on top of everything else. I tried calling Lui, but he didn't pick up. He tended to ghost me whenever **I thought** I was in a crisis and needed him. I couldn't let go. Thoroughly frustrated, I finally gave up and went to bed. I tossed and turned and had disjointed, troubling dreams.

I woke up the next morning still in a foul mood, now exasperated by the lack of sleep. Even though I had a few days left I thought about packing up and going back to the city. I was dejected and feeling like a failure. I decided to give myself one more day. (I can be stubborn.) Doing my best to let go of everything, I made some breakfast, and spent the morning on the porch, wrapped in a blanket, staring blankly into the drizzly mist. At some point it hit me how tired I was. In a daze I went inside and plopped myself down on the sofa.

I fell into another fitful dream. I felt myself struggling and trying to run away, though I could never see what from. Eventually I got tired of running and turned to face whatever had been chasing me. "Finally, you're letting go," said a person I didn't recognize. "We keep trying to talk to you and you keep running away. The truth is we're here with you all the time, you just never stop long enough to pay attention to hear what we're saying. You're supposed to go home, it's important, even if

you can't see what's going to happen. Trust that it's the right thing to do."

I don't remember when I woke up. Not surprisingly the rain had stopped, and I could see patches of blue sky between the clouds. True to form I noticed a missed call from Lui. He always seemed to show up after the crisis had passed. The worse I was in my head, the more "unavailable" he'd be. Sometimes I hated him for that. Like a good mentor though, he'd left me to sort it out myself. I really didn't need his help; I had only been looking for someone to whine to and he never supported that.

With a renewed sense of clarity, I picked up the phone. "Hi mom," I said. "Is this James?" she asked. *After thirty years of living away from Hawaii and calling her every week or so to check in, you'd think she'd know my voice!)* "Yes, it's me, I said. "So, tell me again about this family reunion…"

I booked an open return ticket. My plan was to be in Hawaii for three months or so, then head back and pick up my life again. I had a few things to clear up while I was at home and didn't know how long it would take me. The reunion had come at a good time because it was the dead of winter in NZ, and it would be going into spring by the time I returned.

If I had paid a little more attention to what was going on around me, I would have known that I wasn't going back to New Zealand. I just couldn't or didn't want to see it. People I knew kept making remarks and saying, "We're sad to see you go." They said things like, "I'm so glad our paths crossed." Or "You've been such a bright light in my life." And "You're going to help so many people." I was beginning to sound like a broken record. "I'll only be gone for a few months." They'd just nod, smile reticently, and say, "Sure." In hindsight, even Lui started talking to me like he wasn't going to see me again.

About two weeks before I left my Kūpuna popped into my morning meditation. *"Sell your truck, put your stuff in storage, close your bank account,"* they said. They were very clear, but I was stubbornly unwilling to listen to what they were telling me to do. Despite everything that had happened, I still didn't trust their council and questioned their instructions. Me, James the human, had his own idea of what was supposed to happen and how things were supposed to turn out. I had no intention of permanently leaving and had every intention

of coming back. I was attached to my life in New Zealand and very committed to making it my home.

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Guidance comes in many forms. Most of the time it bumps up against how we view or need the world to be. We think we have it all sorted out and get so locked into what we want, we can't hear, or won't stop long enough to listen to the advice being offered. Sometimes we're so focused on what the next step is that we miss the big picture entirely.

**

I listened to them, sort of. A friend said I could leave my truck with them. I found a small storage locker, (only because it was cheaper than keeping my flat) paid for 3 months in advance and packed my meager belongings into it. And no, I didn't close my bank account.

With trepidation and anticipation, I boarded the plane for the 8½ hr flight from Auckland to Honolulu. A thousand questions ran through my head. My mind was in full overload. *How am I going to feel being home? What will my family say or think about what I've been doing and how I've been living my life?* I felt nervous about the reunion. *Will I connect with this family I've never known? How long will I be in Hawaii?* It felt like I was blindly walking into a gathering storm. An intense case of sciatica developed during the flight. The closer I got to Hawaii the more acute the pain became. It was so debilitating I could barely walk and literally crawled off the plane. It didn't make sense. *What the F is going on? I was fine when we took off.* It wasn't until later when I had time to reflect that I realized how much anxiety I had been feeling and how much my body was holding on to. I'd wound myself up so tightly during the flight that my body had gone into deep contractions. (Incidentally, the pain disappeared the day after the reunion.)

My mom was happy to have me home and cried when I walked into her apartment. I went to the reunion with her and some of my siblings that weekend and met the family we didn't know we had. Close to 350 out of the 600 people that were invited showed up. I was too nervous and unsure of myself to mingle much and never ventured very far outside of our family unit. We were given a spiral-bound book containing the compilation of Diane's research. I was astounded to realize that she had managed to go back sixteen generations.

Receiving that book locked something into place. It was the physical proof of my Hawaiian lineage. It wasn't just an abstract thought anymore. The realization humbled me. Seeing their names as I turned the pages had an incredible effect on me and affirmed the work I had been doing to nurture my connection with them.

There was a slow settling of the energy inside me after the reunion. So many things that seemed random in the past now made more sense. I had always felt like my life had a destiny and purpose and that became clearer after the reunion. I understand now that I come from an ancient lineage of Ali'i[4] that goes back over 800 years. The Ali'i were the rulers and chief stewards of not only the people but also of the land, the ocean, and all its resources. The responsibility to care for the wellbeing of other people is literally embedded in my DNA.

My ancestors were not only the Ali'i but they were also the healers, mystics, priests, and advisors. They were the ones in charge of keeping the customs and rituals of our culture alive, as well as being responsible for passing the knowledge from one generation to the next through a strict code of integrity and tradition. The healing energy that had been slowly percolating inside me over my lifetime is directly connected to this chain of knowledge and information.

Diane's research was so in-depth that she was even able to uncover our family Aumakua[5]. Aumakua were, and still are, believed to be protectors and messengers, sometimes coming to warn us of impending danger or as the harbinger of good fortune. Every family has one or more Aumakua. Diane found proof that one of our family's Aūmakua is Pueo[6], the owl. Pueo have been visiting me all my life. This became especially true as I stepped farther and farther onto my healing path. So powerful was the draw that while in New Zealand I had an owl tattooed onto my chest, over my heart, as a physical reminder of their presence in my life. Another piece of the puzzle clicked into place.

As I flipped through the pages, I recognized the name of my grandfather sixteen generations removed from a book I had read several years prior

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[4] Ali'i Ă - lee- ee; Chief, ruler, noble, govern, reign, steward

[5] Aumakua (ow - ma- kū - ă) Aūmakua (plural) Family deities or personal gods, similar to a spirit animal in the Native American tradition. Aumakua can be either animate (animals, fish, birds) or inanimate (things in nature, plants, stones, clouds, etc.)

[6] Pueo (pū - ā - o) Hawaiian for owl

by a Hawaiian scholar named Samuel Kamakau called "Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii"[7]. He had set out in the mid-19th century to capture the genealogy of the ruling Ali'i class on Hawaii Island before it was lost forever. So many people were dying that he was afraid of the knowledge being lost. Hawaiians had no written language prior to European contact and the genealogy had been handed down from generation to generation through oral recitation. I found my tattered copy and searched for the name I remembered seeing, following it back another four generations. A voice suddenly said, "*How much more do we need to prove to you, that this is who you are?*" It felt like they were chiding me because I was still questioning my connection to them. I closed the book and haven't gone back to it since.

I've come to understand through my life experiences that I am a spokesperson for my Kūpuna. The vision I have of the connection we have forged is of a triangle with me at its apex and them gathered behind me. It's as if I hear and feel them whispering to me. When someone comes to me for help or guidance, I sense my Kūpuna speaking through me to that person. A thought arises or a vision appears. Sometimes it's a word or a phrase. I get glimpses of a scene from a movie or lyrics from a song. In them are messages that help me understand how to talk to whoever is in front of me. It doesn't matter if it's one person or an audience of people, the information they share is always somehow relevant to the situation. What I've learned to do over the years is to stop questioning the download and share it with as much clarity, compassion, and love as I can.

Throughout my journey and as I've forged a deeper connection, I've come to understand that my Kūpuna are constantly asking me to examine my life through the practice of presence, self-inquiry, and right action. In order for me to share their wisdom I have to live in a way that not only honors them but myself as well. In old Hawaii these ideals

[7] Ruling chiefs of Hawaii written between 1860 and 1871. First translated and published in 1961

were taught and handed down through the generations as the practice of Lokahi[8], Ha'a ha'a[9], Pono[10], and Aloha[11].

Lokahi to me is the ability to live in harmony with all things, as well as with myself. It's seeing the oneness of life and the interactions that support it. Ha'a ha'a reminds me to live with humbleness, strength, and self-confidence without arrogance. Pono is my internal moral compass that guides me to choose right action and live as best as I can in integrity while finding balance with myself and the world around me. All of this is anchored with the energy of kindness and compassion that is the symbol and spirit of Aloha.

Everything I've done in my life, and all the lessons I learned when I was in New Zealand, brought me back home so that I could understand and embrace the responsibility of what I literally carry in my DNA. It is the cornerstone of how I show up in the world and share the wisdom so lovingly passed on to me. All I do comes from this core and is the essence of the work I do. It is the gift I willingly accept from them and share with everyone in my life.

Me Ke Aloha Pumehana, (With love and warm regards)

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[8] Lokahi (Lō - ka - he) Lokahi, in its simplest form means unity. It's living in a way to attain oneness and is about living in harmony with self, family, community, and nature.

[9] Ha'aHa'a (Ha - ah - ha - ah) is to live with humility and humbleness. Not from a place of weakness but from a place of assertiveness and self-assurance with respect for others as well as the natural world. Ha`aha`a asks us to be open minded to the idea of life as our teacher and live without having to be boastful or conceited.

[10] Pono (Pō - nō) is to live with righteousness and integrity in a balanced and harmonious way with ourselves, with nature, with other people. It points us to the internal moral compass that is within all of us. It is about living in integrity and with right action.

[11] Aloha is about treating ourselves and everyone around us with kindness, compassion, and love. It is love for self, and love for the people around us, family, friends, and strangers. Aloha is also about the love of nature and the natural world.



James Kawainui is a Native Hawaiian Healer, Mentor, and Spiritual Strategist and an expert in clearing energetic and physical blockages caused by trauma, injury or illness. Experience freedom, hope, and clarity in your life. James' passion and commitment is helping people live positive, passionate, pain free lives. https://www.jameskawainui.com

5

Beyond Betrayal, A Path Forward

Jenine Marie Powell

This can't be happening to you. It can't be. It feels like a bad dream or a scene from a movie. That pivotal scene that changes everything. That scene where you just want to jump in and rescue the main character. A scene you will painstakingly replay over and over again. The scene that has you questioning everything.

But it's not a movie, it's real life- your life. You are the main character. And as you desperately try to comprehend what just happened, everything goes completely blank for a second. In that moment, time stops, there is nothingness. A loud silence. A frantic stillness. A rapid blur. Panic, followed by realization. Gasp.

There is often a defining moment in our lives when nothing will ever be the same again. A moment where everything changes forever. There is our life before that event occurred and then there's our life after that event. What was it for you- this unexpected event? A conversation? A sudden realization? An accident? A diagnosis? An injury? A death? For me, it was a betrayal.

That moment when my beliefs, dreams, hopes and heart shattered. That moment I stood trembling in a locked bathroom, frantically and secretly going through my husband's phone. The moment I found out. The picture. The text. The moment I knew my life would never be the same.

That moment was over a decade ago. Even as I write about it now, a faint pang gnaws at my insides. It's very subtle now. Not that piercing bullet pang that used to take my breath away and leave me huddled in a ball on the floor with my hands tightly wrapped around my head, drenched in endless tears. I'm picturing it now, still like a scene from a movie. I wish I could hit pause and tell that broken version of myself all that I know now. All that I have learned and discovered about life, love, and most importantly myself. My healing journey was long and

complicated, but it landed me here in front of you with a story to share and a message I hope you'll embrace.

Let's go back in time to when I was living a white-picket-fence life in the suburbs with my husband and two children. My family was everything to me- my constant source of joy, love and purpose. Life was good. I was happy. We had it all. Until that day. That one summer day, July 5th 2010, that would forever divide my life between the before and after. The day the movie soundtrack became suddenly somber.

The person I was before I discovered the affair and the person I became after, the two "me's," battled with each other for years. I used to hope for a reconciliation, but now I know better. There is no going back to the old me. I had tried so hard to get her back. I dug deep within to find her. I eventually mourned her loss. At first, blindly grasping, then trying to understand, and ultimately accepting this concept of loss is what helped me find a new beginning.

Fast forward. Today my life's work focuses on new beginnings. I am a certified divorce coach and owner of SOS Divorce Coaching, which stands for Starting Over Single. And, that is exactly what I help people do. Driven by the experiences of my own pain and recovery, I am now committed to providing help and hope to other women and men who are struggling through the emotional complexities of divorce-related issues. No one should ever go through such a pivotal, life-changing event alone. I am here to help, guide, encourage and support others through this difficult transition. I know your pain. I get it.

Thankfully, pain serves a purpose. Think about physical pain. When your body hurts, it's telling you something. It's warning you of a potential injury or illness or ailment that needs tending to. It often forces us to slow down and treat the cause of our discomfort. Emotional pain is similar. It forces us to turn inward. Feel, reflect, ponder, question, process, grow. And just like a broken bone needs to be examined, X-rayed, set and given time to heal, our emotional wounds also deserve professional care, attention, and time to heal. And sometimes, it takes a long time to heal, especially when these deep wounds re-open again and again and again, triggered by subtle and not-so-subtle reminders- a song, a place, a picture, a scent, a memory, a glimpse of what was, a glimpse of what could have been. Just like our physical wounds, our emotional wounds eventually result in a permanent scar. And with every scar, comes a story. What story does your scar tell? Is it a tale of shame and defeat or resilience and strength?

You are the writer, director, producer, and star of this movie. You get to decide. It's these life-defining choices that ultimately lead us to happiness or despair.

So, where will the pain take you? First, let's examine why our betrayal wounds are so painful and why the healing process takes so long. When we are blindsided by an event, or when our lives are suddenly turned upside down, there is shock, pain, confusion, fear and so much uncertainty. We feel vulnerable, unsafe, threatened, rejected, violated, and a host of other intense, often traumatic, emotions that push us involuntarily into survival mode. In this heightened state of arousal, our brains actually function differently. This is when we switch into the fight-or-flight response and the thinking part of our brain, the part responsible for reasoning, the part responsible for rational and logical thinking, shuts down. It's off. This frenzied state holds us hostage in our anguish. We are stuck.

This is where I first landed, headfirst in a wave pool in the deep end of utter confusion and disbelief. I was drowning. The ache in my heart was so severe it was hard to breathe. My body shut down. I couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, couldn't think straight. My brain was literally incapable of processing and comprehending what had just happened. In an instant, life as I knew it, as I believed it to be, was over. I couldn't find my reality. I COULD NOT FIND MY REALITY. And that was by far the most terrifying moment of my life. Then the frantic searching begins - the part of the movie that depicts one's life through flickering flashbacks—a montage of scenes from the past, the highlight reel of one's life stuck on replay. After betrayal, we get caught up in a repetitive cycle of reliving and analyzing and trying to decipher everything in our relationship over and over again in a fruitless and desperate attempt to try to make sense of what happened. How, when, where, and why did everything all fall apart? And how… how do we even begin to pick up the pieces?

Betrayal is shocking. Interestingly, shock is the first stage of the grieving process. It is so important to acknowledge loss as the root of our pain during a betrayal and/or divorce. What is loss? It's having something, then not having something. It's a constant state of missing. It's the absence of what once was. With any loss, it's sometimes impossible to fathom. It's life without. It's a hole. Emptiness. An endless, bottomless ache. When a betrayal results in the end of a

marriage, there is not just one loss, there are many. Recognizing and understanding all these losses help us make sense of our sorrow.

We have lost our spouse, our partner, our friend, our lover, and in some cases, our everything. The person who was supposed to love us more than anything, hurt us more than imaginable. When your protector becomes your destroyer, the knife in your back can truly feel like a mortal wound. If you have never experienced betrayal, you may think I'm being overly dramatic. If you have, you know exactly what I'm saying. I remember thinking, this is not the man I married. I don't know this man. There's so much panic in that statement. This is a stranger. The man I love is gone. I had to mourn this loss.

In addition to mourning the loss of our partner, we have to mourn the loss of our marriage. The loss of a union that was supposed to be forever. The loss of sacred vows. The loss of our binding marital status. The loss of our role as either husband or wife. The loss of being part of a couple and the full life that goes along with that. The loss of the family unit. Take down that wedding picture. Take off that ring. Take away everything you once believed to be true. I could no longer hold on to the belief that marriage is forever, that love is unconditional, and that there is a happily ever after. What else did you believe in that turned out to be a lie? The scheming, manipulating, gaslighting, hidden truths and outright lies that go along with betrayal steal our grounding beliefs and leave us questioning what is real.

In this baffled state, we are also struggling to come to grips with numerous other intangible losses. We have lost our overall sense of security and stability. Our foundation. Our place. All the plans, visions and dreams we had for our future, now gone. All our memories, now tainted. I lost my ability to trust, to love wholeheartedly, to be vulnerable; to live carefree. I lost my confidence, my will, my intuition, my essence, my instincts, and my joy. I lost myself. My identity. In this dimly lit scene, the main character stares blankly into a mirror, searching for a glimpse of herself. We ask: Who am I now that I'm no longer who I once was? Now that life is unfamiliar? Now that I am alone? Simply put, our losses leave us lost.

What does one do when there is all this loss? You grieve and you mourn and you grieve and you mourn, for days, for weeks, for months, for years. What does this look like? It's ugly and messy and full of ups and downs and twists and turns as new revelations and old memories wrack your brain in constant battle. At times, I was numb. Other times,

I was combustible. Furious one minute, sad the next. I remember sitting at my kitchen table feeling empty, void, blank, being unaware of time. Had it been 10 minutes or two hours that I had sat there looking out the window? This dead, timeless, stillness was in sharp contrast to the bursts of volatile emotions that kept me up, writhing, at night. Fluctuating between unrestrained and catatonic states was exhausting. I felt like I was losing my mind, all the while with the well-meaning, good-intentioned people in my life chiming in to gently tell me to get over it, to move on. Move on? How??

Where is that magical switch to turn off all the pain? To quell the emotional storm? To shut down all the memories and ruminating thoughts? To instill hope? How do we turn this heart-wrenching experience of betrayal into our new beginning? This is the scene in the movie where it all comes together- the epiphany. In coaching, we call it the "aha" moment. The main character tilts her head toward the sun, the golden rays beat down upon her. She's engulfed by nature's perfect spotlight. She exhales and takes a step forward. Slowly, gingerly, deliberately, one step at a time, she walks into her future. The credits roll, and the curtain closes.

As a divorce coach, I walk with people into their future, instilling hope and providing tools to help them create a new beginning that is fulfilling, purposeful, and above all happy. How does this process work? To start, I just want to clarify that not all of my clients have experienced betrayal and not all betrayals result in divorce. My title is divorce coach, but I don't advocate for divorce. If a marriage can be saved, if both partners are willing to do the work to rebuild the relationship, then we work towards saving it. The couples' healing journey is a topic for another day. For those of us who ended up alone after the betrayal, whether by choice or not, here are five tips for walking into your new beginning.

1. Understand the depth of your trauma

After discovering your partner's infidelity, there is a surge of intense emotions- confusion, disbelief, anger, sadness. Your brain is struggling to comprehend what has just happened. You have been lied to and manipulated and are now trying to make sense of the truth, but you can't think straight. To make matters even worse, your spouse may be continuing to lie as he or she denies the accusations and attempts to dismantle your proof. This ignites your already heightened emotional state and doubts to an out-of-control level. Your heart is pounding. You

feel shaky. Your thoughts are scattered. Now, you truly feel like you might be going crazy. You are not. I assure you. This response is a normal reaction to a traumatic event, and you are likely experiencing betrayal trauma. This is the emotional distress we experience when someone we depend on, in this case, someone we love, significantly violates our trust and well-being. Our reality has been completely shaken and this has very real physiological, psychological, cognitive and emotional effects. Betrayal is a form of abuse, an emotional assault, that leaves us feeling beaten is so many ways. Once we recognize that what we are experiencing is real and that our response is normal, we gain validation. Our sanity comes back. We have a new understanding. We regain some control. We catch our breath.

2. Embrace connections

People who have experienced betrayal feel so lost and alone. Who do you turn to? Sometimes our first reaction is to go to the person who betrayed us. We want answers, we want details, we want reassurance. We look to the very person who hurt us to heal us. That's not going to work. In the past, our spouse may have been the one we turned to for love, support and understanding, but everything has changed now. Our feelings are no longer safe with the person who inflicted this pain upon us. We want to turn to our friends and family but may not feel ready to reveal the situation to them. Shame, embarrassment, and humiliation often prevent us from sharing our experiences. In many cases, we still want to protect the spouse who has betrayed us. This person has dismantled our life, yet they are still our spouse, still the parent of our children, and we may not want to expose their behavior to others. What will the repercussions be if this gets out? And what happens when we do eventually confide in someone? Will they truly understand what we are dealing with? I needed more than anything to speak with someone who got it. Not someone who was going to rip apart my husband; not someone who was going to tell me to move on; not someone who was going to give me advice; not someone who was going to analyze my marriage; not someone who was going to diagnose and treat me; just someone who genuinely understood. Where can you find this? Join a support group. Meeting and sharing with others who have gone through a similar experience can be one of the most important components of your healing journey. You will be heard and understood, comforted and supported, encouraged and inspired. This feeling of connectedness reassures us that we are not alone and we will get through this together.

3. Flow with your grief

A betrayal and/or divorce is the death of life as we know it. Since there are numerous losses associated with this life transition- the loss of our partner, the loss of self, and the loss of so many other tangible and intangible parts of our lives- it can help to explore the grieving process. Familiarizing yourself with the seven stages of grief- shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing and acceptance- may provide you with a general framework for understanding what you are going through in the aftermath of so much loss. Keep in mind, grief is not a neat, predictable, linear process where we graduate from one stage and move on to the next within a set time frame. It's more like a maze. At times, it feels like you'll be stuck there forever with no easy way out. And just when we think we have found a forward-moving path, we often find ourselves somehow back to square one of our emotional break-down. This is normal. Hang in there. Your individual grieving journey is a necessary part of your healing process. Allow yourself to feel, process, express and release your emotions over and over again as the feelings come and go. Name what you are feeling—is it anger, sadness, regret, resentment, jealousy? Where do you feel the emotion? Is it stress in your shoulders? Sadness in your heart? Fear in your gut? Visualize the pain in your body and allow yourself to feel it, see it, release it. Find an outlet that helps you. Cry. Scream. Shout. Journal, meditate, pray. Write a song. Write a letter. Throw a tantrum. Go for a walk. Burn a wedding picture. Get it all out. When we allow ourselves to grieve and mourn, we are acknowledging and processing our loss instead of repressing what ultimately needs to be expressed.

4. Find peace through acceptance

Acceptance is usually the final stage of the grieving process. When we arrive at acceptance, we can begin to restore our inner peace. Acceptance does not mean forgiving. Acceptance does not mean sugar-coating. Acceptance does not mean forgetting or condoning what happened. It simply means accepting the reality of what happened. Accepting the situation means we no longer have to live in that exhausting state of resistance. We no longer search for explanations. All the questioning can stop. We no longer have to go over in our head all the would haves, could haves, should haves and what ifs. We don't have to invent and re-invent countless alternative scenarios. What's done is done. Period. We accept that we can't change the past, no matter how much we dwell on it, no matter how much we wish it were different.

Accept that this is where you are right now. Accept all the uncomfortable feelings that come with it. Accept that your life is going to be different from now on. You are surrendering what is not in your control. Acceptance is taking all that weight off your shoulders. Let it be. There is so much relief in those three little words.

5. Have a love affair with yourself

You deserved love, respect, compassion and loyalty in your marriage. You really did. You also deserve it from yourself. Honor yourself. Honor your feelings. Honor your experiences. Honor your ability to start over. Be caring, gentle and patient with yourself along your healing journey. Get to really know yourself again. What makes you special and unique? What values do you live by? What are you grateful for? What are you most proud of? What characteristics and traits make you, you? Celebrate all that you are and all that you strive to be. Above all, show yourself grace and love. There are countless ways we can love ourselves. It can start with nourishing your body, mind and spirit with healthy habits, self-care rituals and positive outlets and connections. Self-love also involves setting boundaries. It involves saying no to things that bring you down and saying yes to what you have always wanted to do. Say yes to all that brings you joy. Make the time. You are a priority. Create a positive and encouraging inner voice. Our most important sentences start with the two words "I am_____." How will you fill in the blank? I am strong. I am smart. I am a beautiful person. I am getting better. I am going to get through this. I am excited about my new beginning. Positive self-talk paves the way to a positive identity which paves the way to a resilient, loving, solid self. Your self-love is power, freedom, happiness and security because it's unbreakable by others. With this superpower, you can walk into your new beginning open to all the limitless possibilities that await.

I realize all this is easier said than done, especially if your pain is still raw. I know how hard this journey can be, but I promise you will get there. You will heal. And when you do, it will somehow ALL make sense. The day I discovered my husband's affair, July 5th 2010, also happened to be my birthday. What horrible timing. Could it get any worse than this? I vividly remember every second of that day- the family outing at the beach, the celebration, the ice cream cake, the presents, the sweet handwritten card he gave me, and then that look on his face when I confronted him. There's no need for dialogue in this part of the movie. The anguished expressions between husband and

wife say what words can never describe. I was completely shattered and heartbroken for a very long time. Life went on with a constant, unsettling ache.

Then one day, I had an awakening. Of course, I was meant to find out about the affair on my birthday!! This timing was actually perfect. For on my birthday, I received the greatest gift of all - the truth. It was an excruciating truth, but a truth that had to be revealed. That day and everything that followed during my healing journey, changed me and propelled me into a rich future full of meaning and love and purpose. There's my life before the event and my life after. As with most struggles, we emerge forever changed, and if we do the inner work, we can emerge forever grateful for the lesson, for the new profound understanding and knowledge, and for the unlimited chances to embark on a new beginning.

So, I ask you this: long after your marriage has ended, years from now when you reflect upon your story, when you see it all playing back as if it were a movie on a screen, what would you like the reviews to say? You have the power within to make it an astonishing, triumphant tale!



Jenine Marie Powell is a Certified Divorce Coach and owner of SOS Divorce Coaching. She provides help and hope to individuals whose lives have been turned upside down by divorce. Working with men and women during all phases of the divorce process, Jenine provides her clients with essential tips, practical tools and creative strategies to process their difficult emotions and move forward with confidence and clarity. Personalized coaching sessions are designed to help clients gain insight, perspective and action steps to successfully navigate this complicated life transition. No one should go through a divorce alone, and Jenine is dedicated to being there for you every step of the way.

For more information or to schedule a complimentary discovery session, visit sosdivorcecoach.com

6

Long Live the Crone

Nancy Hall

Part I - Embracing the Crone

In folklore, a crone is often depicted as an old woman who is mean, bitter, malicious, or sinister. She may have malevolent superpowers. She is always ugly.

A more accurate and constructive depiction of a crone is an elder woman, wise and grand-motherly, with the ability to be patient, watchful, and sharp. With her child-bearing days in the past, she becomes the wisdom keeper, healer, and advisor. Her knowledge is sought out by those around her as they navigate life's challenges and transitions.

In traditional societies, the crone was at the center of social and spiritual life in her community. She was a valued treasure.

In the Middle Ages, the church feared these wise women; many were killed during the Inquisition. To justify the erasure of the crone's status, and ensure she would be maligned and feared, the wise crone was replaced by the Wicked Witch and Old Hag characters of modern fairy tales.

Today, as women live longer lives, enjoy better health, and navigate high-profile careers, they are reclaiming their powerful position as wise elders. They are re-writing the worn-out stereotypes of older women as crotchety gals with sagging stockings.

Becoming A Crone

The hormonal shifts of menopause are the natural ushers into cronehood.

For many women, menopause causes an examination of the life they are leaving behind. A time to explore more freedom as family

responsibilities start to decrease. Ideally, it can also allow a woman to focus on herself and what she wants to do and achieve in the years to come.

Many women have mixed emotions when it comes to this stage of their life. They may feel a sense of loss, or question whether they're still "useful." Some women feel their changing identity, morphing body, and retiring fertility challenges their sense of purpose.

But beyond the physical changes, menopause presents an opportunity for women to reimagine their purpose, reclaim their power, and embrace the positive aspects of the crone archetype.

If you are going through menopause, it's normal to feel a loss, or less like the strong, powerful woman that you are. So take this time to think about your life and who you are as a person. Challenge the notion that your vibrancy is tied to your age or your fertility. It's not. You will continue to be the beautiful, smart, and vital person you have always been.

As you enter your crone years, you have the advantage of life experience. You have knowledge, wisdom, and insights superior to what you had when you were younger. Many women choose to take on new challenges — learning new skills or working in different capacities — while others choose to focus on inner work, exploring their values, psyche, and gifts.

It doesn't matter how you choose to approach your crone years, as long as you treat your elderhood as a time for gratitude, joy, and adventure, embracing it as the wonderful time of life that it is.

Becoming a crone was part of my inspiration for my online program, the Midlife to Great Life Method.

Part II - Nancy's Story

You never know when life can take an unexpected turn and throw you a curveball.

In 1998, my boyfriend, Rick (later to become my husband), and I were on a layover in Toronto, traveling from Vancouver on our way to Barbados for a holiday. We were admiring the city lights on that clear, crisp night in fall when I received an unexpected phone call from my doctor.

“I don’t want to wait to see you in person,” she explained. “I think you should know right now,” she blurted out, “you have multiple sclerosis.”

I was floored. No one in my family had ever had any neurological illness. I was 38, two years into a new relationship, and at the prime of my life. Or so I thought.

I had been having odd neurological symptoms — the occasional drop foot, sudden chronic fatigue, and falling while skiing. I found out why.

Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a disease that affects the central nervous system. The immune system attacks the myelin sheath that surrounds and protects nerve fibers, causing lesions along the nerves in the brain and spinal cord, which interrupt electrical messaging. The disease affects everyone differently depending on the number of lesions and where they are located. Symptoms can be mild or severe. It can eventually lead to severe disability and shorter life expectancy if the progression is extreme.

A co-worker, Deb, had MS. I remember reading about MS when she was diagnosed and learned it is an autoimmune disorder. Her symptoms were severe, and I’d watched her disease progress quickly.

As the news sunk in, I was fearful. Would I lose my mobility as Deb had? Would my relationship end? Would I be able to work? And if not, how would I support myself?

I shared my fears with Rick and gave him the choice to stay or leave — at any time — so he never felt trapped. “I don’t ever want to be a burden to you.”

He reassured me, “I’m not leaving you, honey. We’ll get through this.” We continued our trip to Barbados feeling very subdued.

I am by nature innately curious and love to learn. I am a problem solver and will do whatever it takes to find answers to a problem. I’ve never been one to feel victimized, so I decided to do whatever it took to stay well. I prayed that night for guidance.

Within a month of my diagnosis, I learned about a spiritual training that intrigued me. I was having lunch with my friend, Mary, on the outside patio of a restaurant on Commercial Drive in Vancouver.

It was a gorgeous fall day, and even though the traffic was passing nearby, we were deeply focused on each other and catching up. An

acquaintance of Mary's was passing by and noticed us at the table. She squeezed between the row of planters outlining the patio space — calico scarf trailing behind her — and plopped down at our table.

"Mary!" she squealed. "I haven't seen you since the women's retreat in March! You're going to want to hear about this new course I've been taking."

"I'm learning about manifestation, meditation, and vibrational psychology," she shared. "It helps awaken psychic gifts and initiate wellness — physically, emotionally, and spiritually."

I was intrigued.

Mary and I continued picking away at our salads, and her friend darted off to catch her bus. Within a week Mary and I were enrolled in Training in Power Academy. That chance encounter — and the course I was about to begin — would change my life.

During my first class, I knew I'd found the spiritual home I had been seeking my entire life.

Using what I learned at the Training in Power Academy, I was able to change the trajectory of physical illness to one of wellness and vitality. I was introduced to energy work and meditation, and explored the connection between consciousness, energy, and healing.

First, I started to pay attention to my intuition. No, more than that. I *acted* on my intuition. Over the months and years, I developed my intuitive and psychic abilities and used tools and techniques for conscious manifestation.

When I was diagnosed with MS, I instinctively knew nutrition was going to be important in treating an autoimmune disorder. So, I pursued studies to become a holistic nutritionist.

Over the years, I benefited immensely from craniosacral therapy treatment. So, I became a biodynamic craniosacral therapist.

In my early 50s, I was diagnosed with celiac disease. I studied the gut and the microbiome with a vengeance. I discovered that I had been living with a gluten allergy since birth, which may have led to the autoimmunity of my nervous system. (When you have one autoimmune condition, it can lead to many unless you know how to reduce inflammation.)

As you can see, when I want to learn about something, I don't just read a few books. I dive in. I embody what I am learning and then want to share it with others.

What I gained from the Training in Power Academy was so profound. Their mission is: *Heal the Self, Heal the World.* Once I was able to heal myself — physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually — then I was then able to assist others. After years of training, I became a teacher of this work. I am honoured to be on the faculty of Training in Power as a Level 1 Teacher.

Training in Power helped me navigate through my original fears of my disease and transform them into opportunities for new beginnings. From that diagnosis sprang my personal transformation.

Since then, I have been able to manifest beyond my wildest dreams and live my life consciously with purpose and intent.

I learned to heal from trauma, childhood impositions, and ancestral belief systems (like the OLD crone paradigm).

Being an empath — often to my detriment — I would unknowingly take on others' thoughts and pain, not being able to differentiate what was mine or not. Once I had a greater sense of who I am, I learned to differentiate that which wasn't mine.

I had to learn to set boundaries and how to correctly facilitate others on their journey without rescuing them or absorbing their energy. This process allowed me to know myself in the deepest sense. I am on a journey of healing at a soul level.

Learning how to clear these burdens paved the way for me to pursue my passions.

Now, 24 years later, I am vital and well.

I thrive on my spiritual practice and my motto for health is:

Eat real food. Move your body. Practice mindfulness.

The foundation was now established for the Midlife to Great Life Method.

Part III – The Midlife to Great Life Method

Eat Real Food

"Eat Real Food" means ditching processed foods and focusing on fresh, local, in-season, organic, whole food. These foods are anti-inflammatory, keep your blood sugar stable, feed your microbiome, and influence your DNA. How? Let me tell you…

Inflammation and Disease

There are two types of inflammation: acute and chronic. Acute inflammation is an immune response to an injury or infection. It protects the body and is part of the healing process. Chronic inflammation occurs when it is ongoing, wreaking havoc on our health. Chronic inflammation is the common denominator in all diseases and is associated with heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, autoimmune disorders, and even cancer.

Food can often be a trigger and cause chronic inflammation. Foods containing gluten, sugar, unhealthy fats, and preservatives are the most common culprits.

Blood Sugar

You've probably heard of simple and complex carbohydrates, right? The simpler the carb, the faster your body can digest it. If you eat a bunch of simple carbs, all that glucose is sent into your bloodstream at once. Insulin is released to manage the glucose in your bloodstream.

What happens next? You crave more carbs to raise your blood sugar back up; this puts you into the never-ending cycle of craving carbs and gaining weight. This blood sugar roller-coaster is a big problem for people who eat a lot of carbohydrates, even complex carbs.

If you aren't using your body to burn that glucose, insulin stores the excess glucose as fat. Over time, insulin becomes less effective at doing its job, creating insulin resistance. The sugar that can't get processed is stored in the arteries creating inflammation throughout the body.

Protein is used by the body differently than carbohydrates. It is digested much more slowly because it has more complicated molecules, and it takes your body longer to break them down. When you eat protein, your blood sugar stays stable longer.

As you age, it's important to eat fewer foods that are high in carbs. However, women after menopause do need some carbs for thyroid health. Include some protein and fat every time you eat to increase satiety. And limit carbs to those that are whole and complex, such as fresh fruit and vegetables.

Your Microbiome and Gut Health

The health of your guts affects your immune system, your heart and brain connections, and your endocrine system. All disease begins in the gut, and health begins there too.

When you eat gut-healthy food, gut issues will resolve, your microbiome will be brought back into balance, and many issues — such as inflammation, joint pain, brain fog, and anxiety — will resolve. Excess weight will fall off, and hormones will come back into balance, naturally. The reason gut-healthy foods make such a positive impact is because they support your microbiome.

The gut is not the same as the microbiome. The gut houses the microbiome. And the microbiome needs a healthy house to live in, so we first focus on healing the gut.

Once you've removed inflammatory foods like gluten and sugar, then you can repair the gut with healthy food and supplements and restore the microbes with probiotics and fermented foods.

Your Magnificent Microbiome

Your microbiome is a huge collection of bacteria. Trillions of bacteria reside within us, and they outnumber our own cells 10 to 1.

Wait, bacteria? They're bad, right? Nope. Bacteria can be good. When they are part of an ecology within your body, not only are they not bad for you, but they are also crucial for your health and longevity.

If you are in good health, then your bacteria are in good health, and they protect you from harmful pathogens. And if we are in poor health, it's because the bacteria are out of balance.

A healthy microbiome allows the gut wall to absorb nutrients and keep out toxins. Your microbiome influences the neurons and inflammatory cells in your brain. The microbiome directs the nutrients in the body, so the brain gets what it needs.

The microbiome also affects the heart and circulatory system, the immune system, the endocrine system, and the stress system. Conversely, these systems in turn affect the health of the microbiome. It even interacts with our genes, knowing exactly how to turn genes on and off. And it's interacting with all these systems simultaneously.

The microbiome is your greatest ally when it is healthy and balanced. Choosing fresh whole foods, including fermented foods to feed the microbiome, can positively impact the microbiome in as little as 24 hours.

DNA and The Power of Food

Food not only feeds your microbiome, but it also influences your DNA.

Your DNA carries genetic material that you inherit from your ancestors. We know that genes can be influenced by food, environmental factors, and even our thoughts, which work like switches to turn genes on or off.

Food has the power to turn on our good genes, things like longevity and intelligence. And it has the power to turn on bad genes or variants, called “genetic SNPs.” These are genes we have a predisposition to such as obesity, Alzheimer’s, arthritis, or sensitivity to caffeine.

The Skinny on Fat

You hear it all the time: fat is BAD for you!

“Drink skim milk instead of whole.”

“Get fat-free yogurt instead of full-fat.”

“Have an egg white omelet.”

“Trim the fat off your meat and remove the skin before you eat it!”

But is this the best advice?

Here are the real facts about fat...

Eating fat does not make you fat. Processed carbs, sugar, and high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) lead to insulin resistance and ultimately fat storage. Plain and simple: eating SUGAR makes you fat.

Healthy fats are important for:

• Making hormones

• Brain health

• Energy levels

• Supporting your thyroid

• Strengthening your bones

• Strengthening your immune system

• Reducing your risk for cancer

• And so much more…

Healthy fats include things like coconut oil, olive oil, avocado, nuts and seeds, grass-fed butter and ghee, fats from grass-fed, hormone-free animals, and Omega 3's (found in fish). And remember, too much of anything — even healthy fats — will have an impact on your waistline.

The "unhealthy" kinds of fat you want to stay away from are trans fats. Trans fats are found in packaged foods like baked goods, margarine, and a lot of fried foods. Anything labeled "partially hydrogenated" or "hydrogenated" contains trans fats.

Also stay away from refined seed oils like safflower oil, canola oil, sunflower oil, peanut oil, soybean oil, and corn oil. They are highly processed and high in Omega 6 linoleic acid (LA), which throws off the ideal Omega-3 to Omega-6 balance, causing inflammation.

And in case you're worried that eating more healthy fats will increase your cholesterol, there is NO significant evidence that eating saturated fats is associated with an increased risk for heart disease. (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20071648)

Now that the kids are gone (or at least grown), it's time to feed yourself well. Clear your pantry of the processed and packaged foods you relied on to feed many mouths quickly. Substitute those unhealthy foods for homemade, whole-food options. Visit my website for recipes — from energy bites to full-course meals — that have delighted my clients for years. This is the first step in living a life of vitality after menopause.

Move Your Body

I can't even count the ways that moving your body (stretching, strength workouts, cardio, or just through active daily living) improves your health.

Movement helps balance your hormones. It keeps your insulin levels in check (which is super important because high levels are linked to diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and inflammation). It helps you preserve muscle as you age.

Being active improves your thinking, relationships, and purpose in life. It is great for reducing stress, anxiety, and depression

As you age, if you're not intentional about keeping your muscles active, you can lose as much as 3% to 5% of your muscle mass each decade! When you maintain lean muscle mass in your body, you'll burn more fat during the day and prevent bone loss as you get older.

We were born to move!

No matter what your current activity level is, the more you move, the better your body will function. Once you start moving more, you become more functional which inspires more confidence. That confidence makes you want to move even more, which leads to improved fitness and body composition and even more function and confidence. Hooray!

You don't need "workouts" to move. Our ancestors didn't go to an exercise class. They were walking, climbing, running, crawling, swimming, digging, squatting, throwing, and carrying things. They danced. They played.

Here are easy ways to naturally incorporate movement into your daily life:

• Start your day with gentle stretches or yoga, in bed or on the bedroom floor

• Use the stairs instead of the elevator

• Park at the far end of the parking lot

• Do a task sitting on the floor so you maintain the ability to get up and down

• Take a walk before your morning shower, during lunch, or after dinner

• Take your dog (or the neighbor's) on an extra walk

Movement is not just for feeling better now, but for aging healthfully.

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the act of being fully present, paying attention to your thoughts and the world around you, calming the nervous system, and knowing how to de-stress.

Stress

Stress plays a huge role in our health. Fatigue, headaches, mood swings, menstrual problems, weight issues, and brain fog are all signs of stress. We all know that stress doesn't feel good. And that it isn't good for our hearts, our health, or our relationships.

You see, stress activates a complex network of hormones known as the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, more commonly known as adrenal fatigue. Stress affects your endocrine system (hormones), microbiome, immune system, and contributes to weight gain.

Our adrenal glands were designed to help us cope with physical stress and danger. Unfortunately, due to the fast pace of the modern world, we run around like crazy, and our adrenals have to constantly release adrenaline and cortisol to help us function.

Secreting too much cortisol, day after day, has been linked to several health conditions. And over time the adrenals can become underactive, and then a whole host of other symptoms and conditions can occur.

There are foods, herbs, and supplements that can nourish your adrenal system and help you cope with daily stress. However, reducing your stress load is crucial, especially if you have an autoimmune disorder.

Mindfulness and Stress-reducing tools

• Breathe. Yes, you breathe all the time, but you can gain even better health if you pay attention to your breath. Deep breathing can increase the feelings of calm and release stress. Try this box breathing technique the Navy SEALS use to stay calm and increase concentration: inhale slowly through your nose to a count of 4, hold for a count of 4, and exhale slowly through your mouth to a count of 4.

• Gratitude practice. Recognizing the positive things in your life will attract more positive things. That's the Law of Attraction. You can do this with daily journaling or a morning meditation on things you are grateful for.

• Sleep. When we sleep, our body repairs and restores. Establish a healthy sleep routine by going to bed and getting up at the same time every day and get at least 7–8 hours of sleep.

• Connect with nature. My favorite thing to do is forest bathing (walking mindfully in the forest, deeply inhaling the luscious smells of the old growth trees and listening to bird song).

Part IV - The Wise Crone Speaks

Reframing your perception from "midlife" to "great life" requires a paradigm shift - in how you value your life, how you care for your body, and your state of mind.

The magic happens when the mindset shifts. "When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." — Dr. Wayne Dyer

Physics is behind this "magic." Your thoughts are electromagnetic and when you are thinking and imagining a healthy vibrant YOU, that energy is being created. In essence, you create your reality.

Lessons to take with you

Your great life requires self-love and forgiveness, proactive health actions, and realizing your worth. How you feel about yourself on the inside will be reflected in how you manifest on the outside.

"Let food be thy medicine, and medicine be thy food", said Hippocrates, the father of modern medicine, 2,000 years ago.

Well, that quote still rings true today. Be the best version of yourself starting with the food you eat. Eat real food that nurtures you from the inside out. Incorporate healthy lifestyle choices by moving your body daily. And practice mindfulness.

Three simple tools to lovingly embrace your crone self and live a great life!



Nancy Hall is a Natural Nutrition Clinical Practitioner and a teacher of Meditation and Metaphysics.

When Nancy started to experience undesirable menopause symptoms, she used her education and 20+ years of nutrition research to devise The Midlife to Great Life Method. Now she empowers women, in all stages of menopause, to eat for hormonal balance, lose fat, and be the best version of themselves at every age. nancyleehall.com

7

A Perspective and Case Studies from a Hypnotherapist

Alana Belik

As a Hypnotherapist I am acutely aware of words, language patterns, story, narrative, imagery and how all of these influence our subconscious mind, which, in turn, influences our beliefs, thoughts, feelings, actions and ultimately our life experiences. So I will begin by declaring that I categorically do *not* believe that miracles exist in the way that we normally think about them. Furthermore, I do hope to convince you to believe the same. Please allow me to explain.

A miracle, by definition, is some kind of fortunate event or phenomenon that is not expected, highly unusual, improbable, extraordinary and unexplainable. I intend to illuminate the fact that miracles can be created, and expected, they happen often, they are likely to happen, they are normal; and, just because something is not yet explained by popular science does not mean that it is unexplainable. There was a time in our not-too-distant past when hypnosis was considered to be in the realm of the occult - unseen, unexplainable, supernatural and magical. Now we have the ability to see what occurs in the brain during hypnosis and so understand how the science of it works. There is no mystery and there is no magic to it. The hypnotist holds no mystical power.

When we desire to experience a change, a new beginning, or a favourable future, it does not benefit us to frame it as a miracle - at least not with the current definition of miracle. Doing so impresses upon our subconscious that the chances are slim and the capacity to achieve it is completely out of our control, except perhaps by having a high degree of faith.

New beginnings can be an incredible opportunity for learning, growth, authentic self-expression, and ultimately for creating a joy-filled life -

with the operative word being “creating”. How do we create new beginnings, or create from new beginnings, that the majority of people would call miraculous? Let us first take a look at how new beginnings happen in the first place.

Because all of life, including stars, planets, humans, animals, plants, material matter, thoughts, emotions, light, sound - everything, is made of energy, and energy is always in motion, change is inevitable. New beginnings are inevitable.

Sometimes change happens in a way that is unexpected and unwelcome, like a tragedy, the death of a loved one, the loss of a relationship, the loss of a job, the loss of a dream, a betrayal, a scary health diagnosis, or a global pandemic.

Sometimes change happens in a way that is unexpected and welcome, like a lottery win, an inheritance, love at first sight, a great offer, inspiration, sudden insight and clarity, or a spontaneous healing.

Sometimes change happens because a way of being becomes increasingly uncomfortable or unbearable to the point of *needing* to make a decision for change, like coming out, leaving a relationship, leaving a country, giving up a toxic substance, or speaking the truth.

Sometimes change happens because we desire an increase in something such as health, loving relationships, money, space, freedom, confidence, knowledge, variety, fun, creativity, or fulfillment.

However it happens, a new beginning tends to catapult us into the realm of the unknown. It involves shedding an identity and becoming familiar with a new one. That means that we will experience new behaviours, thoughts, feelings and emotions. To make that experience as comfortable as possible, we must be open to shifting our beliefs because beliefs act as a perception filter; and, anything that does not fit into our belief system can cause major resistance. Resistance causes suffering and suffering can make change difficult if not impossible. A part of our brain leads us to move towards pleasure and away from pain and suffering. To create behaviour change, outer change, a lifestyle change, we must create inner change by shifting our beliefs.

Many people believe that human change is very difficult and that it takes a long time. That is not true; however, it *will* be true for the person who believes it because, again, anything that goes against our beliefs

causes suffering; so, our brilliant subconscious mind works at moving towards pleasure and away from suffering, thereby either creating a reality that aligns with our beliefs or choosing the familiar over the unfamiliar - to not change.

How are beliefs formed? Beliefs are simply thoughts that have been thought so many times that they feel true. Most of us never question our beliefs because they run in the background, in the subconscious mind. We only question our beliefs when something is not working or when life has thrown us into some kind of catalytic event when we must question what on earth is going on. It is valuable to know that beliefs are just thoughts.

One of the easiest paths to freedom is to know that thoughts are not facts. Facts are facts and I am not sure how many of those actually exist. Thoughts can be excruciating when they are unhelpful and untrue, yet are liberating when they are helpful and when they are true.

Of course, there are thoughts and things that are true and are still excruciating, like “I lost my best friend” or “I broke my leg”, in which case the thing to do is to grieve and/or heal.

For now, we are looking at thoughts that may be impeding our path to positive new beginnings.

How can we understand if a thought, a belief, is true?

Here is one way to unravel a belief:

Is this belief true for everyone on the planet? If so, it is likely the truth and the absolute truth cannot be changed. (Please note here that there are many examples of people who have exploded popular “truths” by accomplishing something new for the very first time, revealing that the former truth was not a truth at all but a widely held belief. Just read the “Autobiography of a Yogi” by Paramahansa Yogananda, “Becoming Supernatural” by Dr. Joe Dispenza, or the Guinness Book of World Records.)

So, if a belief is not true for everyone on the planet, can it be absolutely true? No.

If it is not absolutely true then it is a belief, relatively true for me and anyone else who believes it.

Can a belief be changed? Yes.

How can a belief be changed?

Evidence. Look for evidence of a different, more helpful belief, that others are living. Look for others who have made a similar change. Study the science of change. Search for what else is possible. Decide to choose different thoughts.

A new thought, a new decision, a new beginning can happen as quickly as the snap of our fingers. A new beginning can happen as quickly as we commit to it. A new beginning can happen as soon as we believe it is possible. A new beginning can happen as soon as we believe that the change will provide more pleasure and less pain.

There is a part of our brain that is not logical, does not think, is responsible for our survival and it resists change. It resists change because, well, so far so good. It goes something like this, "You *felt* stressed and you smoked a cigarette and then you *felt* better and you are still alive; therefore, smoking a cigarette = yes." Remember, that part of the brain is not logical and it is not weighing out all of the harmful aspects of smoking that the logical part of the brain knows about. During and after the cigarette, the stress dissipates so the logical brain comes back online and berates the self for smoking which causes stress which causes the logical brain to go offline and survival kicks in because of the stress and says it's time to smoke a cigarette to get rid of the stress and then you *feel* better and you are still alive; therefore, smoking = double yes. Now do that 20 times a day for 30 years = 219,000 times yes. Now that very unconscious part of the brain has formed a version of a belief called a habit. The belief is the thought we keep thinking and the habit is the action we keep doing because of the belief.

Here is the good news. We can access the parts of the brain that run automatic habits, hold beliefs and belief systems (called schemas, which is just a word for a bunch a beliefs surrounding one topic), and create new habits, new beliefs and new schemas; AND, we can do that relatively quickly, all while relaxing peacefully. This can be done using hypnotherapy, self-hypnosis and some types of meditation. But I don't want you to just believe me.

I hope you enjoy the following real-life case studies of new beginnings that appeared miraculous that I was honoured to be part of with clients from my own practice.

Case Study 1:

Sam was a 35-year-old man who was miserable in his work because he believed nobody there really liked him, unhappy in his living situation sharing an apartment in a small town in Northern Alberta, distressed about his health because he kept failing to give up regular "partying" with copious amounts of alcohol and drugs and he was heartbroken after a string of failed relationships. Thankfully Sam was committed to turning things around.

During hypno-analysis, we discovered that Sam developed a belief of "I am a failure" because of his father's continual teasing and humiliating him in front of others. Also during hypno-analysis, Sam discovered that his father's teasing was never meant to be cruel but to toughen him up and prepare him to be resilient in life. With this new perspective, Sam was able to understand and forgive his father. He reframed his own belief of "I am a failure" to "I am loved".

Next, we did some clarity-seeking through hypnosis and conscious conversation regarding what Sam's true authentic self wanted to experience, what constituted true success for him and who he really wanted to be. As it turned out, Sam wanted to express himself through creative endeavours such as writing, film-making, music and visual arts. He wanted to live in a house with a basement that he could convert to a studio and he wanted the house to be in a busy centre. He wanted a smart, beautiful, creative girlfriend who would love him for who he was. He wanted to bring in $10 000/month and he wanted to have fun doing it.

Even though Sam did not understand how he could achieve the life that he wanted, he was willing to go along with the process. After two months and a few sessions of generative hypnotherapy, Sam received a job offer in Calgary making just over $10 000/month. He took the position and soon discovered that he was working with a small team of likeable people with whom he shared a great sense of humour and fun. Not long after his move to Calgary, Sam bought a house, built himself a basement studio, wrote and published a children's book, created a short film, and met the girl of his dreams.

We connect once a year or so and he is still doing extremely well. He and his girlfriend are living together and engaged, he is still expressing himself through art, still clean of the drugs and alcohol and still loving his vocation. He describes his transformation as almost effortless. He

said that as soon as he saw the lie of his past and the truth of himself, everything began to fall into place.

Case Study 2:

Jessica was a 53-year-old woman who wanted to quit smoking. She grew up in a household of smokers, all of her relatives smoked, most of the people in her community smoked, and she herself started at only 12 years of age. She had a love/hate relationship with smoking, describing it as her best friend and her worst enemy.

Because Jessica identified so strongly as being a smoker, as opposed to being someone who sometimes smokes, I gave her homework to research the lives of other people who had been smokers who had successfully quit and also to research the lives of people who had never smoked. This, I knew, would start to create a new paradigm within Jessica of a life possible without smoking.

Something extraordinary happened while Jessica was in hypnosis. She discovered that the part of her who wanted to keep smoking was not even her, but the energy of a loved deceased male relative named Charlie who passed away when she was 12 years old! Charlie quite naturally assumed that continuing to smoke through Jessica was a perfectly acceptable thing to do as he also had lived his life surrounded by smokers. Jessica asked him to leave and asked any other part of her that jumped on Charlie's bandwagon to either leave with him or jump off and reintegrate into her as vibrant allies to her health.

The entire process of releasing the unwanted and creating a new identity with Jessica took five sessions. Not only did she quit smoking but she also started exercising, and eating healthier, and she discovered new hobbies and pastimes which opened up her social circle where she met a wonderful man with whom she loves to hike and travel. She describes her new life as feeling more happy and free than she ever could have imagined; however, she did indeed imagine it and that is exactly what she created.

Case Study 3:

Marco was a 39-year-old man who presented with depression, anxiety, lack of motivation, high blood pressure and was overweight. He immigrated to Canada when he was 7 years old. His father was abusive and his mother was timid. At only 7 years of age, Marco had already witnessed extreme crime including murder, had experienced physical,

emotional, and psychological abuse by his father, and sexual abuse by a priest. His school years in Canada were difficult because he started without knowing the language and felt that he never fit in. Marco joined the army as soon as he could and did very well there. He married a magnificent loving woman, Maria, had 3 children and created a beautiful happy life. Everything changed when Covid hit. Marco spiralled downward very quickly and could not understand why. Maria sought out my services, desperate for help after nothing else seemed to be working.

I learned that Marco never shared any of his past with Maria. He wanted to protect her from the ugliness. He wanted his past forever buried. Unfortunately, the deep sense of powerlessness that Marco felt as a child was like a hidden dragon awakened by the Covid lockdown. It reaffirmed his long-held belief that "life is not friendly and people are not safe".

Through several sessions of many different kinds of hypnotherapy, Marco was able to heal from his past and feel enthusiastic about a safe and meaningful future. He did share his past with Maria which deepened and strengthened their relationship even further. Together they started an outreach program in their community and are helping hundreds of people connect and honour traditions from their culture. The positive ripple effect of Marco having the courage to tell his story and restore his own inner power is absolutely inspiring and awesome in the truest sense of the word.

It is easy to see how choosing a new path - a new beginning - creates a new trajectory with people, places and things that align with the new energy. Every timeline has its own unique energetic frequency and we have the power to create whatever energetic signature that we want for our own lives. We do this through our emotions, as emotions are energy in motion.

I encourage you to spend at least twenty minutes each morning using your precious energy and will power to focus your imagination in a way that envisions what you desire. Choose again and again to create everyday miracles in your life. Your words are your wand and your energy is the power that ignites the magic.



Alana has been in the healing space for almost 2 decades. Her personal and educational backgrounds have prepared her to empathize and connect with people from all walks of life. She is a Certified Master Trainer who trains and certifies Hypnotherapists. She also works with clients 1:1. www.lightworkerhypnotherapy.com

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Want to be Happier? Learn to Embrace C-H-A-N-G-E

Rosalind Beresford

I was someone who was used to change. Change revolved around me my whole life and yet in my late 40's, I was paralyzed by my fear of change.

As a military brat, I moved 5 times before I was 10. At the age of 10, I was along for the ride as my mother found the courage to embrace change to save her life and the lives of her 7 children from my raging, abusive, alcoholic father. Between the age of 10 and 17, I moved 5 more times. As a university student, I moved every 4 months. As a wife and mother of two, I moved 9 times – 7 of those moves were international.

One thing all those moves had in common was my ability to start over. Even with all that change, I was able to find stability. I was able to reinvent myself many times to suit the new neighbourhood, culture, and host country. I was able to morph all that experience with change into a career as an intercultural trainer for multi-national corporations and ex-pat coach to people moving to new countries.

I knew how to manage change and yet, when I badly wanted to make a major life change, the very idea of making that change felt overwhelming. I knew making that change was my best option to find happiness. I knew from my mother's example that it was possible to become the hero of my own life but I was paralyzed by fear.

So why do we fear change so much?

- Change is risky

When your brain senses risk your defense mechanism kicks in. Your brain becomes flooded with dopamine and it looks for any corrective actions it can trigger. It encourages every available neuron to regain control. Your brain is wired to provide answers to uncertainty. It wants you to do anything to reduce stress. Your brain defaults to the easiest and least painful option – the easiest solution is to stay in your comfort zone.

- Uncertainty is more stressful than predictable negative outcomes. – *Think about that.*

We'd rather face predictable negative outcomes than face uncertainty and risk that something good could happen. This is what drove me to search for the evidence of my ex-husband's multiple infidelities. No matter how devastated, disrespected and unhappy I would feel – at least I would know for sure. That pain I felt in the moment somehow satisfied my need to be certain. For 20 years it wasn't enough to get me to make a change because my life, while painful, was also comfortable because it was familiar.

- The unknown is scary.

Change is all about moving into the unknown. Fear causes unclear and irrational thinking and behaviour. You end up staying in unhappy and unhealthy situations.

- Your brain hates loss.

Especially when you have an emotional investment. You don't want to lose all the time and effort that you've already exerted. Your brain's desire for loss aversion means you will likely make choices to avoid change. Aversion to loss can cause logic to fly out the window. My brain was convinced that I would lose everything I had enjoyed for 30 years.

- Your brain expects things to stay the same.

Change challenges the information stored in your brain. Trust is broken. Any change that is inconsistent with your core beliefs will be scary and stressful. You develop core beliefs about how the world is supposed to work just by living that way for an extended period – change challenges that.

By my late 40's my identity had morphed into expat wife and mother. It was a comfortable and rewarding life. My brain wanted my life to stay that way.

- We're so afraid of what others will think we're afraid to try.

My brain convinced me that family and friends would judge me foolish for the choices I had made to stay despite the infidelities.

- Your brain will tell you stories.

You may fear that you won't survive and thrive. This was my greatest fear. You become convinced that the lies your brain is telling you are truths. Your brain weaves a story about horrible consequences as means to get you to jump back into your comfort zone. It is safer there than it is on the other side of change. My brain convinced me that I would return to the unstable, subsistence lifestyle of my childhood if I chose to change my marital status.

Because my brain was doing its job, I found myself afraid to embrace the very thing that I knew had saved my mother's life all those years ago. I was resisting change, and yet, I was the kid you wanted to be the carefree, adventurous Mary Tyler Moore.

I found myself grappling with chronic infidelity. Suffering in silence. Making myself sick so I could continue living a very comfortable, unhappy life.

The aha moment that pushed me to challenge and deal with my fear of change came when I realized just how sad and broken I felt.

I had been pretending to myself, to my kids, to my friends, and to my extended family, that all was good. It wore me out. I became physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted. Fear showed its ugly face in every area of my life.

I realized then that the very thing that was going to save me, was also the thing that I feared the most. After all, hadn't my mother saved her life and mine because she had the courage to embrace change?

We allow fear to disguise itself as practicality. Was I going to choose fear or was I going to choose to become the hero of my own life and embrace change?

Leaving a life of stability and security for a new, unknown life that I understood would make me a happier, healthier person was scary but I knew that even if I ended up having to be a barista in a coffee shop to make ends meet – I was going to be happier.

So where was that young girl who wanted to be Mary Tyler Moore? I had traded my soul for security and stability but – my soul wanted to fly and it did. I knew I was not going to resist change again.

Change is scary, but I learned to control my fear of the unknown, and so can you.

There are some specific actions that will allow you to manage your fear and live in the unknown.

You can embrace – **C-H-A-N-G-E**

Change – Control Negative Thoughts

Negative thoughts can appear in many forms: harsh judgments about ourselves, comments from others (that rarely have anything to do with us), hypothetical thoughts about what could have been, and worries about what might be. Negative thoughts can keep us safe. They're why we look both ways before crossing the street. But they can also stop us from fulfilling our potential.

When our brains run away from us, we can't run away from our brains: our negative thoughts follow us wherever we go. We start to see worst-case scenarios, and even though a tiny voice might tell us these scenarios will never happen, a *much* louder one continually tells us *they might*. We may try to silence that louder voice with a vice, which on the mild side can include an extra piece of cake and on the extreme side a drunken night of shouting at the people we love. There are better ways to deal with your negative thoughts.

Two practices I recommend to help you control your negative thoughts and create a more positive mindset are mindfulness and gratitude.

Mindfulness is a form of meditation that requires you to focus on your breath, and/or your senses. You can practice it anywhere – even in your car on the commute to work. Just start by taking cleansing breaths. Choose whether you want to focus on what you see in front of you or hear or if you just want to focus on each inhale and exhale. Really focus.

If you struggle to control the negative thoughts when you initially start meditating – that's ok. It is normal. Anytime we engage in a new practice — either with someone or on our own — negative thoughts will arise. Acknowledge them but don't confront them. Let them flit into and immediately flit out of your focus – like clouds floating by.

You've likely already learned that beating them back with a mental tennis racquet just volleys them back to you with a strong backhand. So we know that tactic doesn't work. Vices don't get rid of them either, especially if you use your vice as that tennis racquet. In contrast, mediation helps you work with those thoughts and can ultimately help you dissolve them.

Stop judging yourself harshly. Learning to focus on the present and accept yourself as you are is the first step to fulfilling the life-altering change you're contemplating.

The second practice I encourage you to try is a practice of gratitude. It can be in the form of regular journal entries about things that you are grateful for or it can be in the form of a prayer of thanks each morning or night. It's pretty simple as long as you take the time to focus on the good each day.

Learning to focus on the present, the positive, and self-acceptance is the first step to fulfilling the life-altering change you're contemplating. This is not a form of ignoring the bad that exists in the world. Positivity is an approach to change, good or bad.

cHange – Have Confidence in Yourself

We all want more self-confidence. Self-confidence can mean the difference between enjoying life and being afraid. Not all of the factors that contribute to self-confidence are under your direct control. But enough of them are to make a huge difference. You can develop the habits and skills that make self-confidence automatic.

Here are 7 tips to boost your self-confidence.

1. **Keep track of your successes.** Do this all day long. Start each day with a fresh sheet of paper and list your successes. It might be a good performance at a meeting or completing a report on time. This system will change your focus and increase your self-esteem.

2. **Pay attention to your body language.** Strong, confident people stand tall and sit up straight. Maintain good eye contact. Keep your

body open. Smile. Pay attention to your surroundings. Imagine the most confident person or movie character you can think of. How do they stand, walk, and move?

3. **Do something that makes you uncomfortable.** Having success outside your comfort zone is a fast way to increase your self-confidence**.** Take a speech class or jump out of an airplane. When you can deal with discomfort and experience success, your self-confidence will grow rapidly. You have countless opportunities to test this theory each day.

4. **Get rid of the negative voices in your head.** Those self-defeating thoughts that never seem to stop can be a major drain on self-confidence. Catch yourself when you're making negative comments to yourself. Change your self-talk to something more positive.

5. **Make of list of all the great things about yourself.** List them all: your smile, sense of humour, and ability to play the banjo are all fair game. List everything about yourself that's even slightly positive. You can probably rattle off all your faults. You'll probably require more time and thought to make a list of your positive qualities.

6. **Be assertive.** When you ask for what you want, you feel more confident. When you go after the things you want, you feel more confident. Taking control of your life results in greater self-confidence.

7. **Focus on others.** By focusing on making a contribution to others, you don't have time to worry about your own perceived flaws. One way to stop thinking negatively about yourself is to put your attention on something more important. The positive feelings and respect you'll receive will also allow your self-confidence to grow.

A little more self-confidence can kick-start your ability to manage change

chAnge – Allow Yourself to Freak Out

You likely know this feeling: something inside of you is trying to burst through, but it terrifies you. You do what you need to so it stays in its cell: eat chocolate, scrub grout, or have an extra glass or two of wine. You may not want to acknowledge what that sensation is about, but I

suspect you know. Listen to me: That sensation is making you want to freak out, and I'm here to tell you that it's okay to freak out.

When I refer to "freaking out," I don't mean it in the sense of screaming at someone who's triggered something in you. I mean that need to let those emotions out, either in the presence of someone you trust or on your own (so long as you're safe). It's this need to release those negative emotions you've been bottling up this entire time. It's when too many emotions at once need to exit, like the metaphorical kettle that's about to blow. You may need to cry, shout, pout, scream, punch your pillow, dance like a maniac, or a do a combination of any of those.

Freaking out is part of the process of handling stress. Our brain is hard wired to manage stress through action: that's why some people get busy with cleaning or another activity when they're stressed. There was a time when humans' biggest stressors involved grave danger to our lives. We had no choice but to act to save ourselves. You've heard of the fight or flight response? Freaking out is in fact our brain forcing us into fight mode.

So when you allow yourself to freak out, you are actually processing the stress.

It really is okay to freak out, to acknowledge your fear, and to cry and be angry. It is an opportunity to let go and welcome something new. Freaking out is not permission to give up: think of it as a step up, not a step-down. It cleanses your thoughts so you can more easily step over that threshold into the life you know you deserve.

chaNge – Narrate Your Own Story

I have a confession to make: I often behave like a commercial airline pilot: I need to follow the manual, know the plan, and only accomplish tasks on my detailed (mental) to-do lists. Does that sound like you, too? This kind of thinking leads us to believe we'll live more efficiently and effectively, yet we often end up drowning in all the rules. Did you know you can still be a captain without all that control? It is possible to stop following the manual and narrate your own story.

When I talk about not following a manual, I mean stop living your life according to "shoulds." We've often created our manuals from a list of "should", of expectations we perceive our family and friends have for us. But following this list can lead to a great amount of anxiety and

unclear thinking. Instead, try to practice accepting things as they are and use that place of acceptance as your platform for planning your change.

To let go of that perceived life manual, live more in the now. Living in the now doesn't mean throwing out your daytimer. Instead, it means embracing challenges with a curious, open mind and treating them as learning opportunities. Imagine yourself as the captain of not an airplane but of a canoe. You set the canoe on a path in the water, cresting along as the water ebbs and flows, with river banks supporting you all the way. Your approach to change can unfold in a similar fashion.

chanGe – Go Nuts

Have you experienced any of these signs when impending change is on the horizon: stomach issues panicked thoughts, an inability to sit still, and emotions on steroids? These very uncomfortable feelings seem to be telling you the same thing: don't allow the change to happen. But that would leave you stuck in a situation you know you need to get out of. So what can you do?

George Bernard Shaw said that we don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing. Going nuts is about doing something fun to wildly release that energy.

Is going nuts the same as freaking out? No. Freaking out is about allowing yourself to feel and process the emotions the change is provoking. Going nuts is about finding joy in that change. This is where you'll find more confidence and power to make it through.

Want my secret to the icing on the cake for this stage? Whatever you do to go nuts, it should push your comfort zone a little bit.

When I was in my 20s, I was invited to a white water rafting weekend with a girlfriend. I said I would join her for the weekend, but there was no way I was going to raft down a raging river. However, once I got there, the excitement and enthusiasm of the other participants were contagious, and I swallowed my fear and got in that raft. I loved it. My confidence grew and my fear declined.

Depending on where you are in life, white water rafting and similar adventure activities may frighten you because of the obvious physical danger involved. When I talk about going nuts, you don't have to put yourself in harm's way. Going nuts by having fun means doing

something a little crazy – a little out of your comfort zone – something that would surprise your family and friends. It looks different for everybody.

changE – Evaluate What You Are Feeling

You need to process the emotions associated with the change. Remember – you are letting go of an old way of behaving and thinking to embrace a new way but if you are attached to the negative feelings about the change or you are suppressing your true feelings about the change you are not likely thinking clearly and logically about it.

If the only emotion you can identify is anger. Take some time to really evaluate your anger. Sometimes anger masks other feelings like sadness or hurt.

Is it fear? What are you fearful of?

Is it grief? Why are you grieving?

Is it excitement? Why is it exciting?

Here is a simple exercise to try. It may be very challenging at first especially if you are – like me – not comfortable with the idea of evaluating your emotions.

Ask yourself these two questions – How do I feel? How do I know?

Take regular short 1 to 2-minute pauses throughout the day to check in with yourself physically and mentally.

- Become aware of those areas of your body where you are feeling discomfort or tension.
- Become aware of thoughts running through your mind.
- Name how you are feeling.
- Once you've become aware of these things and named your feelings breathe in and out long deep, cleansing breaths. Make the exhale longer than the inhale.

This exercise activates the part of your body that regulates emotions and your nervous system. It promotes the release of oxytocin which makes us feel calmer.

Another way to evaluate your emotions is by using logic.

Let's say you experience something – Your co-worker brings in cookies and offers one to everyone else on your team except you.

Your interpretation is that he deliberately snubbed you because he doesn't like you.

The result is that you feel sad and rejected (ie your emotional response).

To change your emotional response, you need to re-evaluate your interpretation of the situation. Look for the evidence that supports your interpretation. Did he really snub you or were you in the washroom when he came by your desk? Has he gotten too busy to be wandering around handing out cookies? Do all your co-workers have to like you?

Challenging your thoughts and beliefs about a situation and about yourself can change your emotional response. Emotions can cause logic to fly out the window. Once you can see how illogical your interpretation is you can tackle the chatterbox in your head that is promoting the feelings. In fact, it will help you connect to more positive thoughts and emotions.

Maybe you can relate to not feeling good enough, not smart enough. Maybe you feel like the devil you know is better than the devil you don't. You wonder – "What if I fail?' I know change can be scary but I also know that everything you want is on the other side of that fear. I challenge you to imagine instead that you fly.



I help clients transform that scared little voice in their heads into a chorus of self-empowerment.

By the time I was 17 years old, I had moved towns and neighbourhoods 10 times. As a wife and mother, I moved 9 times – 7 of those moves were international moves. In my early 50's I started over as a divorcee. I learned from a young age how to transition to a new life. I know how to start over. I know how to help clients reinvent themselves.

I am a member of the International Coaching Federation and an experienced certified life coach who partners with my clients to successfully incorporate long-lasting mindset changes using a wholistic mind, body and spirit approach to skills development.

I have a passion for, and extensive experience in, managing life transitions. Since 1995 I have lived in Singapore, Tokyo, Chicago, Hong Kong and Turkey. In each location I reinvented myself and pursued opportunities to learn about the local culture and to give back to the host country.

I began coaching others who were managing similar transitions in 2010. I believe that while change can be scary, overcoming that fear will allow you to become your own hero and create an extraordinary life. I am committed to paying it forward and spend much of my time providing pro-bono coaching to women in need who are struggling to find direction in their lives.

Fun fact – as a child I always wanted to take dancing lessons, but we did not have the money to pay for lessons. As an adult, I have taken ballet, belly dancing and ballroom dancing lessons. I am living my dream. I still can't dance but I have fun trying. https://www.triskeliontransitions.com

9

Giving Along the Way

Sharon Bates

You can do anything you put your mind to is what parents often tell their children and I am no exception.

As a child, I would dream about wanting to be a hairdresser, all my barbies had G.I Jane haircuts and cool-aid hair colour. "Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life." — Confucius

The high school I attended had a cosmetology program that allowed me to earn my hairdressing license while in school this was a perfect opportunity for me. I did an apprenticeship, worked for a year at a high-end salon then opened Tangles at the age of 19. At that time, I was looking for a flexible job as I wanted to travel and do more hair shows. I happened to stop in at the salon I had once done my co-op placement at. The owner was thinking about leaving the industry and asked if I wanted to purchase the salon. At 19 and hadn't thought about owning a business but the opportunity was in front of me. I made her an offer with every cent I had to my name and what money my parents were willing to contribute. She said "no" to my offer I left thinking that's ok it was not meant to be. 3 weeks later she called me back and said would if I still like to purchase the salon. It wasn't fancy or large (only 500 square feet) but I made it my own and little by little Tangles grew. As the clientele grew, I was able to hire my first employee, and eventually, I grew out of the space. I have since expanded twice and our current location is almost 1700 sq feet and 8 employees. We grew slowly but consistently, always being an active part of the community.

One of the best things I ever did to grow the business was joining the local Chamber of Commerce. I took every workshop and seminar that I could. I remember the very first networking meeting when I was asked

to stand up and say my name and business. I was so nervous I let someone else speak for me. Little did I know that years later I would end up organizing the annual award gala and was selected to be the MC at the ceremony. The Chamber has been a tremendous resource for me and throughout the years many opportunities and recognitions have come from the Chamber. At one point I had over 200 new clients from members and referrals. The average person knows 100 people, but a business owner knows 1000 so networking with other local business owners was a great way to market my business.

I truly believe Everyone can (and should) do something to give back but that something can be very different from person to person. Whether it be volunteering, donating money, time, talent, or organizing an event. Sometimes physical jobs like sorting food at a food bank and the list could go on and on. If you're interested in giving back to your community but don't know where to start do a little google search to find out where the needs are in your community and what might interest, you. There are so, so many benefits of giving back it's not just a good thing to do it also:

- Gives your life purpose and builds character
- Being a part of a community builds positive relationships with neighbors and like-minded people.
- Can open doors and other opportunities
- Make a meaningful difference in people's lives
- Sometimes you receive a charitable donation letter or students earn community service hours
- Gain self-pride, self-esteem,
- Makes the world a better place.

My parents and grandparents have always taught me the importance of giving back. I remember my grama having duct tape of a pot handle when I was a small child. I would ask why we don't just buy a new one at the store, and she would say "someone isn't eating dinner tonight I would rather give the money to someone in need." My dad and grandfather both have thank you pins from Canadian Blood Services for their long-standing contributions. I have had some great role models in my life, and I knew when I opened Tangles that I wanted to do something more for the community that supported me and my business. When I first opened our local hospital was reaching out to the community for funds to build a cancer center. I had hosted shave your head for cancer events, pink highlight days, and buy a brick fundraiser

in the salon donating proceeds to the hospital. Those events had always been a great success and I was ready to do more. I was very actively participating and volunteering at the Chamber of Commerce, and they did not have a home show at the time. Small business-like mine are always looking for affordable marketing opportunities, especially events that have face-to-face opportunities to showcase their goods and services to customers.

And so … The East Gwillimbury Women's Show was born. It took me a full year to organize on my own and with volunteers. The first year we managed to raise $6000 and I was astatic to be able to donate that money to the local hospital. I continued the show every other year and eventually was able to donate $100,000 from the events. At the last show, we had over 50 vendors and 500 guests at a fashion show hosted by Jessica Mulroney and me talking about the models' hair. 300 gift bags, a large silent auction, and a $1000 makeover door price. The event is such a win-win situation for everyone involved. The vendors are always so happy to be a part of the show, the attendees get sample gift bags, and always a great day out with a friend, and of course, the hospital gets much-needed funds. The hospital was able to purchase equipment like vital sign monitors, a head and neck brace, radiation suite monitors, and much more with the funds raised. These types of equipment are being used every day and are a part of the lifesaving efforts our local hospital does.

At a thank you event that the Southlake Hospital hosted they unveiled a Thank You plaque above the chemotherapy chair that my mother received care in. That was such a meaningful way to thank me. I call Tangles a community salon because we are involved in community events and organizations. Over the years we participate in

- Santa Clause Parade
- Sponsor local sports teams
- Attending school/ community fundraisers
- Donating gift cards or prizes to events
- 100 Women Who Care (York Region Chapter.)
- Chamber of Commerce (East Gwillimbury & Newmarket)
- Dragons Den-themed guest panel for local high school

- Guest at local schools to teach cosmetology
- Chats makeovers for seniors
- Cooperative education program
- York Region Women in Business
- Town of East Gwillimbury holiday gift boxes
- Locks for Love
- Southlake Foundation Gala and the list goes on

I am currently a writer in a column called Who gives….. East Gwillimbury? Published in a local community magazine called The Bulletin. I truly love being able to tell all the stories of what people do to contribute and give back to our community it is an honor for me to be able to share those stories.

People like doing business with good people. I know in my own life my favorite boutique is not the closest location to my home (they ship to me), other stores sell the same brands, but they care about their community and go above and beyond for their customers. That is why I always look to them first when I'm looking for a particular item. I have noticed in various salons I have worked with it's not always the most talented hairdresser that has the most clients. What counts is the relationships and the care that goes into every one of those haircuts/services. In our world, we are constantly being bombarded with advertising approximately 6000-10,000 ads a day. Every business struggle to set itself apart from its competitors. It could be price, quality, awards, or claim to fame. I am proud of the business I have built being known as a salon that gives back has set me apart from my competitors.

Things I have learned along the way

Effort equals results owning a business has not always been easy I have had my share of bumps along the way. The biggest challenge was the Covid-19 lockdowns. The salon was forced to close for 9 months yet still had rent and other expenses. My father would say to me "if being in business was easy everyone would do it and then you wouldn't be able to have a business anyways." Owning a business is defiantly not for everyone. It's more than just 9-5 it's a huge part of my life Tangles is on my mind 24/7. There is always a project or something I am looking to

make better and improve. Sometimes I joke and say that Tangles is like my first-born child. It was only me working all the hours of the salon when Tangles first opened. It took me about a year to build up enough clientele to justify my first employee. I expanded within the same plaza twice but always only after I was busting at the seams in the space I had. It always seemed to work out that another larger unit was available when my lease was up and I was able to expand. Education has always been an important component of my building Tangles. As the fashion/beauty industry is always changing; if I and the staff of Tangles aren't continuedly upgrading, we will be left behind. Throughout the year we have educators come into the salon to share the newest techniques and products. As well as local hair shows and industry events we attend. We are a loyalty Moroccanoil salon and we earn trips to their New York academy every year. We do an in-house contest once a month to see who wins opportunities and prizes this builds team spirit and comradery, and the team always has something to work towards.

Practice makes perfect: It's not just the junior hairdressers that will be trying a new technique or tool out on a mannequin, you are never too old to learn something new in our industry. I have learned that no one is good at absolutely everything or even enjoys every aspect of their job. To make the best work environment is to learn about your staff's strengths weaknesses and things they enjoy most what motivates them and plan accordingly. Currently, in the salon one staff member is not a fan of the newest technique balayage and although they are trained and, in a pinch, could definitely perform this service, many other staff members love providing this service, so it just makes sense to book balayage with the staff that enjoys that service.

Kill them with kindness: Winn Claybaugh, my favorite author and motivational speaker has a book called "be nice or else".

You just never know what is happening in someone else life. If someone is having a bad day or something going on in their life. To go the extra mile, offer that coffee take their coat, be extra friendly and keep a smile on your face. Kindness can be contagious and turn a bad day around. Winn says "Being nice will open doors and leave a lasting impression. When you start being nice everybody wins."

If you don't have anything nice to say you don't say anything at all: Truer words have never been spoken. This is something my mother reminded me of growing up and I'm sure this advice has saved me from difficult situations many times. You just never know who knows who

and if you speak ill of someone it might get back to them. If you're frustrated with someone it's far better not to say something, take a breath and think about it before you speak than to say something you will regret. I remember being very pregnant cutting hair and saying my husband wants to name our baby Rosemarie I said this is more of a nursing home name than a nursery name and the client in the chair beside mine spoke up and said, "my name is Rose and I'm not ready for a nursing home!!" My stomach sank.

Fake it till you make it: Being 19 I had to earn the trust of clients that I was capable of providing quality beauty services. Acting my age was not going to cut it. Focusing on thorough consultations identifying the client's needs and solving their beauty challenges with services and products that I was able to provide. That was the focus for each client. I remember as clear as day my very first customer at Tangles and the awkward pit in my stomach as I walked them to the front desk to pay. I guess I had some self-doubt and did not know my worth yet. And now Tangles has provided almost 1000 services a month and no longer I have that pit in my stomach at cash-out time.

"Do your best and forget the rest" - quote by legion Tony Horton the creator of p90x the most popular workout of all time - 11 billion people have joined his class. He used this quote to motivate his students to not worry about the next goal and focus on the now. Sometimes despite all your best efforts you don't get the results you desired; we are only human we can only do so much. That doesn't mean we give up; we get up the next day and try again. It is ok for not every situation to work out perfectly on the first try.

You never know where an opportunity will lead. So many times, in my life I would volunteer or be asked to help out with something, and it turn into something much bigger. Krystal was hired as a junior hairdresser I hired her and trained her through her apprenticeship. Now almost 10 years later she is the manager at Tangles and such a valuable team member. I have a client that I once met in a liquidation-type store - I don't remember how we started talking, but he now lives in Huntsville 2.5 hours from Tangles, and he still travels to see me. I can think of so many clients that I have gained because I participated in something completely unrelated to hair, but we made that connection and they have been loyal for years. We have clients that travel 2-3 hours away to come to our salon, they must drive past dozens of towns with multiple salons but something about Tangles makes it worth the drive for them.

You just never know where life's road will take you and since every day is a gift we may as well live the life we dream of having.

Tangles has more to do to get to my ultimate goal for the business has not yet been accomplished but every year I get closer and continue to work towards my goals. I know the best is yet to come.



Sharon Bates is a young entrepreneur and small business owner of Tangles Hair Salon. A thriving hair salon & spa located in East Gwillimbury just north of Newmarket Ontario since 2003.

Sharon received her hairdressing license through an apprentice program at Huron Heights Secondary School. She has worked in high-end salons in the York Region area. But her goal and passion has always been to own and operate a hair salon. At the age of 19, she became a young entrepreneur. After two building expansions to accommodate the expanding clientele and staff, Tangles continues to flourish. Currently With a team of 8 staff members including specialty trained in laser beauty services.

Sharon has focused on professional growth. She has continued to upgrade her skills with industry-focused courses and training both on hair styling and management. Such as earning a certificate in spa management and a hair colour master program. Sharon encourages her staff to upgrade themselves and provides programs for them to excel. Her staff has earned several educational experiences in New York and Paris for training, photo shoots, and competitions.

Sharon is currently a monthly writer in a column called " Who Gives….. East Gwillimbury?" focusing on people, businesses, or groups who give back to the community. In a local publication called "The Bulletin Magazine". She has received several awards and nominations for business as well as community service. Including a Queen Jubilee Medal and a Contessa at the Canadian Hairdresser of the year awards.

Sharon is a high-energy go-getter, she is balancing her family life with her passion for her beauty business and giving back to the community.
https://tanglessalon.ca/

10

Perspective is Everything: A Wellness Focus

Jennifer Stapleton

Life can seem cruel sometimes. My husband Patrick has always been active in sports. He was a former sprinter, a track and field coach, and a supervisor of a massage therapy program at a college dedicated to training health care practitioners when he suddenly and inexplicably suffered a paralyzing spinal cord injury on May 20th, 2015. We call that 'The Event.' He was fine the night before, while talked with him at 11 p.m. as I was taking care of my beloved grandfather in Tucson, Arizona. The next morning at 6 a.m., Patrick blacked out at home and woke up 20 minutes later, unable to move from the waist down. And since I was not at home when this happened, he spent six hours on the floor before he was able to receive help.

Patrick's father had been living with cancer at that time, though there was no pathology to indicate why my husband fell and woke up the way he did. He was in the best shape of his life, eating healthy foods, working out and serving his community. After I flew back home from Arizona, Patrick's father, friends from work, and cousins helped him get to the hospital and luckily, I was with Patrick for his spinal cord surgery where titanium rods were inserted into his back. I distinctly remember his distinguished surgeon, Dr. Gurr, describing Patrick as a "perfectly-healthy 48-year-old with a spinal cord injury." No explanation since has been offered as to the cause, so the only way to move forward after the surgery was to allow for, adjust to and accept the Event that caused this result. Patrick focused on moving forward in all the ways he could, getting support if offered, and adjusting to a new way of life, even if that meant

without the use of his legs. Patrick found most of his support at the local hospital, where he learned how to drive with hand controls, befriended other amazing individuals with spinal cord injuries, and became a peer support volunteer. At this time, from 2015 on, I was starting to meet and feel called to support other caregivers as a peer support volunteer as well, and we continue to support Spinal Cord Injury Ontario in particular.

Patrick and I have had many adventures in our 25+ years of marriage. We met while we were both teaching English in Japan! And soon after we arrived, we both experienced a large earthquake where we lost many material things and focused on what is most important to us. That focus absolutely, without question, bonded us. Despite having been brought up in different countries, with different ways of doing things and different religions, we shared many of the same core values, and one of our most important shared values has been quality of life and wellness. Also, since we have been married for over 25 years now, many people have asked about our secret to a long marriage. We have reflected on that, and have concluded that along with the wellness and service focus, we never go to bed angry, and share a lot of the same humour!

Focusing on wellness and humour has also been my fuel as a caregiver. Patrick and I have our own core values when it comes to everything from health to finances to our relationship, and these values have given us a clear direction and purpose when it comes to making decisions and propelling us to the next level in our health, wellness and relationship. Having a house that feels like a home is important to both of us, and we recently made Patrick's childhood home more wheelchair accessible. With the addition of new rescue animals we adopted recently, our home has a roomy and homey vibe we love to live in, and we finally have room for guests! The more, the merrier, and having a home that feels like home is a core value we share.

Despite our finances taking a hit after Patrick's injury and my teaching career at one point coming to a standstill, the abundance was still there in other areas: relationships, shared quality time,

love, family, animals, walks in nature, a roof over our heads, good food, freedom to choose next steps, and getting to spend more time with each other.

We each felt frustration concerning the parts of our lives that were not functioning the way we had planned, from our vocations to lasting friendships, yet we started to discover ways we were living our lives on our terms as a result of the accident, such as having more time and love abundance even if other areas had us struggling. And by taking care of our mindset, attitudes and awareness of our basic needs, we came to find that we are living more optimal lives, on our terms, as a result.

As a caregiver, I have learned that by taking care of myself as well as I can under stressful circumstances, and by receiving love and surrounding myself with supportive people, even if many are new friends rather than old ones, I have found I have been better able to take care of my husband, which has also allowed him to better able to take care of himself in ways that have surprised even him.

Self-care is the key, and that not only required a shift in perspective but a new definition of what that means. For me, it involved meditation with the calm.com app. It required me to focus on getting a night of good sleep (even if it is not as long as I would like it to be; sometimes I average 4 hours one a night and catch up with naps). Focusing on movement of any kind and good nutrition was a helpful perspective. I began to look at walks with my dogs as being my lifesaver. Patrick bought a recumbent trike to ride alongside us for some of those walks, and it was glorious! Finally, as a music major and former music teacher, I have returned to playing piano and sharing my playing with others. I have learned that people like listening to me play!

By becoming more aware of my thoughts, that lead to my beliefs and actions, I have become more conscious, self-directed, and I started recognizing that optimal living is about learning how to react to change and challenges in a more responsive way. I feel closer to living my full potential than I have ever felt.

Wellness is not just filled with ‘me-time’ activities like at the spa; it is more of a well-being focus, from caring about your environment, seeking help, finding balance, clearing clutter, exercising, being grateful for the money you have (I learned this by starting to thank my bills; that was a nutty experiment), listening to books on Audible, and finding – and creating – work I felt proud to do. Also, I have been developing a ‘biohacking’ mindset, and figuring out foods, drinks, projects and a schedule that best works for me.

I find I am constantly and actively seeking how to live the healthiest lifestyle I can for myself, my husband, and our fur-kids. At least once a month, making time to take day trips or see friends or go to the movies gives me a sense of vacation and allows me to recharge my batteries and enjoy time out. ‘Not having time for a vacation’ has been the number one admission many caregivers share about what they grieve most.

Plan for Wellness

We don’t stumble into wellness, and wellness is not just about eating healthy. Wellness is every aspect of our lives. My husband's spinal cord injury does not define him, though, for the first three years, I let it define me. I was also at that time caring for my father-in-law who had bone, prostate and skin cancer, as well as a family member who died two years ago who had unexpectedly asked me to be her Power of Attorney.

The stress of caregiving, working part-time, and carrying the burden alone took a heavy toll on me for a time, and I felt a lot of grief and loss. Yet it helped me to know I was not alone. First Lady Rosalynn Carter said that “there are only four kinds of people in this world: those who have been caregivers, those who currently are caregivers, those who will be caregivers, and those who will need caregivers” (2020, c/o Carter Institute for Caregiving). Therefore, with my new caregiver coaching business – Guiding By Your Side - I have created a way to serve empathic family caregivers, to acknowledge these facts, and believe that is better to address head-on a lot of the serious problems encountered by those who care for their loved ones. Take a

moment to reflect and notice: Who truly takes the time to care for the caregivers in your life?

Rather than letting society dictate that caregivers need to be martyrs, I invite caregivers and those cared for to start empathizing with friends, family and staff who learn to pace themselves and provide service the best way they know how to do it. Caregiving is a full-time job on its own, or at least a part-time one, depending on what other care options are available or accepted, case-by-case.

Taking care of oneself is not selfish; I see it as the best way to guarantee quality continued care for the one who needs it. It is the most loving thing a caregiver can do. Asking for help is never a sign of weakness; it is a wise sign of strength.

Time-blocking is the best way caregivers can thrive. Taking time to strategically locate periods in your day to pause, regroup and re-examine your needs and situation can become life-changing in a great way. Becoming aware of caregiver needs (sleep, a walk, music, writing or a coffee break for 10 minutes) does wonders.

As for my husband Patrick, he is even more open-hearted and appreciative of the life we have led and have created since the accident. I've learned a lot from him and his positive attitude, despite his injury. One of the greatest lessons that Patrick has taught me is that his injury doesn't define him or what he is capable of, being paralyzed. He lives his life the way he always did, with levity and a determined and quiet humility.

When Patrick was first injured, I read many books, attended many seminars, and did research on spinal cord injuries (SCIs). We both asked why it happened, but 'why' turned out to be an ineffectual question to ask. 'How' was a much better question, and we are still looking for answers as to how an accident like Patrick's can happen.

Life is about appreciating and noticing the present moment as much as we humanly can. Our sense of purpose these days has been about doing the next most important thing until each day

ends, when we go to bed, sleep however long we can, and wake up to greet the new day. I have learned to appreciate that having a routine is helpful for myself and everyone else in our home, including the animals. We still experience a lot of surprises and celebrate the little things we can control in life. Instead of trying to fix or help Patrick, which implies there is a deficiency, I now do what I can to best serve him every day. I focus on my love for him and our fur-kids.

I also frequently remind myself that because of Patrick's injury, I have bettered my own life. I have noticed my limitations, my boundaries, my hopes, my dreams and my friends who are there for me. My 'work' is fulfilling because it pays me in more time with my husband, and it pays me with a tremendous amount of intimacy and love. It has made me a more compassionate, appreciative, and observant person, particularly in the area of things able-bodied people take for granted. It has given me confidence, and a lot more humour.

Through the fear, pain, and uncertainty, we both chose a perspective of life-enhancement. Caregiving has also brought me closer to my passion: helping other caregivers who have just started their journey, as well as those that have been caregivers for years without having had someone who gets them to talk with. Optimal wellness, I have learned, is not just about the body, but also about the soul, the mind, the spirit, the attitude, the gratitude, and tons of unconditional love.

Patrick's injury has been a hardship, yet it has also introduced so much more love and gratitude into my life. My perspective is that I am now a better person because of it.



Jenny Stapleton is a coach, pianist, and teacher. In 2020, Jenny earned a certificate in Loss, Grief and Bereavement Studies that complements her B.A. in Piano Performance and TESL certificate. She became a certified life coach in 2022. You can reach her at: guidingbyyourside.com

11

A New Beginning Starts with an Ending

Dianna Lesperance

My new beginning did not start beautifully. It was messy, vulnerable, and at times embarrassing. I was a prisoner of my mind, isolated and controlled by critical and fearful thoughts. Moving through the day, I felt like I was in a river of sticky glue,-wading in freezing water with weights strapped to my ankles. I desperately wanted to move forward but felt stuck, frozen in time. My heart fought for comfort while my mind fought to survive. I was living through uncertainty, sadness, and overwhelming loss – all because of one moment – that drastically changed my whole world as I knew it. The moment I call, my gut-punch moment.

The gut punch

One unsuspecting day, I texted my fiance, "what do you want for dinner" with a surprise reply, "nothing, I am not hungry." His response felt strange, it was 6:00 pm, and we had nothing taken out for dinner. Pushing forward, I stopped at our favourite local Vietnamese restaurant to pick up supper. Fighting the hustle and bustle of rush hour traffic, I felt excited to start my weekend and to get out of my business clothes into something more comfortable. I felt relief and excitement arriving at my front doorstep. A weird sensation filled my body upon opening the door, and immediate chills ran through my spine. I continued to walk into our home, greeted with silence, something I had never experienced before. I push the strangeness away, ignore the discomfort and keep walking up the stairs. His blank stare meets me in the living room as I put our food in the kitchen. I cannot remember what was said next, but I remember his awkward presence, his legs crossed with medium blue jeans hitting his ankles, his brown shoes swaying on the table.

Then, I must have heard something like, "sit. I need to talk to you." The same discomfort rises in my chest. I try to push it away. Admittingly, I was ill-prepared for what was to come next. We rarely fought. We never once discussed his unhappiness. I was utterly blinded by surprise as I listened with confusion, my mind in chaos, the floor seemingly falling from under me. I felt gut-wrenching dread. In that breathless moment, I yearned for anger, to remove the pain in my chest, to bring back a sense of control - to make sense of the swirling chaos that seemed wrongfully disjointed and coldly directed. How could this possibly be happening?

I will stop there. You get the gist. You should know that this was not the first time I experienced relationship loss. In a previous long-term relationship, I experienced many moments of fear, powerlessness and shame. Stick with me – I share this story for a good reason, to give you a glimpse into building resiliency.

The fire starter

I recall powerlessness as the overarching feeling in this relationship: mountains and valleys, highs and lows, the cyclical patterns of alcohol use and intimate partner violence. At times I yearned to escape but felt utterly trapped by conflicting values of security, love, trust and emotional bonding. After a contentious argument that I also take responsibility for, things got out of control. My ex went on a cold rampage, lashing out destructively and sending me fleeing for safety. It was one of the most fearful times of my life. I had never seen this side of his rage. I regretted the ill-positioned conversation I had the night before, disclosing my unhappiness to an acquaintance who ignited terror with one text message.

Legal matters turned into heightened stress with many complications. A fire lit in my belly as I had never experienced before. I stood with my every being to protect my daughter's wellbeing, not from her father, but from a person who was not his best self, which she deserved at the very least. It was a gruelling fight, all in the face of power and control. This fire steered me to advocate for my daughter's best interests, prioritizing her safety and securing the parental connection in every possible moment. We faced losing our home to non-payment while trying to sell it, losing my daughter's daycare placement, and moving, while I could barely afford essentials. I was being ordered to court repeatedly for negotiations on the no-contact order imposed upon him by the law. Was I stressed? Yes! Max capacity stressed.

As you can see, these stories are contrastingly different. However, the result is the same. An unfamiliar new beginning opened its door meaningfully in ways I could not imagine.

Divorce and separation transition

Before we talk about building resilience, let us take a second to understand the change and transition process outlined by William Bridges. Change is hard. I will not sugarcoat the difficulty of divorce, separation or relationship loss. These transitions are emotionally complex, and your story is uniquely yours, filled with layers of love, loss, anger, hurt, betrayal, resentment, loneliness and resilience.

As you let go, you can begin to take hold of your new reality. Nevertheless, as most of us do, you can get stuck between letting go and taking action. This space is called *the neutral zone*. When we resist change, we stay in the neutral zone, unconsciously building our new self. If you are hanging out in the neutral zone, I get it. I stayed there, too. I feared new beginnings in every relationship failure, noticing the unnerving feeling of uncertainty. If I can make it simple, change is the event, and the transition is our action or inaction, which leads the journey to self-discovery, value connection and remarkable resiliency when you respond with your inner power.

"Getting over a painful experience is much like crossing monkey bars. You have to let go at some point in order to move forward." – C.S. Lewis

With a divorce, you may face many endings: your future dreams, relationships with spouses, family, friends, neighbourhood connections, lifestyle, and a disconnect from your partner's children. These are all genuine and challenging losses. As I described earlier, you may be stuck in chaos, stalled in stagnation and fear. In the neutral zone, internal change can happen; you can shift into power, take control of your future, and walk a new path of your new beginning. Now is the time to colour your new beginning with understanding, self-compassion, new values, fresh perspectives, independence, and self-love.

But how, you ask?

Fostering resilience, embrace change, one day at a time

Like you, I am on a continuous journey of self-discovery fostering resilience and finding peace to move forward. Throughout my relationship loss, I have learned several ways that have helped me move forward in rebuilding my inner self, cultivating the courage to embrace change and follow my dreams. My sincerest wish is for some of these tools to support you along your journey.

Allow yourself to feel pain

To date, one of the most meaningful conversations I have had in my life was when I talked to a colleague. We were training together, and during one of the most enlightening conversations, she nonchalantly mentioned a sentence that would stick with me and forever change my perspective on healing. She asked me, "have you given yourself permission to feel?" I sat, pondering how often I have pushed discomfort away to live a positive life, a life of pushing forward in distraction. Strangely for the first time, I could accept my vulnerable and sensitive side, accepting myself in melancholy and lower mood, experiencing brief moments of sadness as feeling, not weakness.

In this way, I hope I can relieve some of the pressure you put on yourself to "be happy." Giving yourself permission to feel allows you to shed light on your shadow, to heal and reveal the best version of yourself. Start by recognizing your emotions and reflect on your facial expressions, body language, tone of voice, energy levels, and how others respond to you. Next, consider the source of the emotion and what happens with your thoughts and feelings. Then label your emotion to increase self-awareness. When you label your emotion, you can recognize and control your reactions. Learn what you need to regulate your emotions. I use breathing and exercise to help reduce stress responses and critical self-talk. I highly recommend working with a therapist to heal your inner critic.

Importantly, if you are experiencing a low mood most of the time, reach out to your doctor and a therapist for support.

Who is your certain-team?

Your *certain-team* are those that show up when you need them most. My family and closest friends were fundamental in helping me balance grief and life. Nevertheless, as my resilience grew, I focused on engaging with a network of experts to support my journey to independence. Connection is imperative. Find trusted relationships you

can count on that provide support and non-judgmental understanding through your community, friendships, family or social connections.

Support groups are another alternative, where you can meet with others going through divorce, separation or relationship loss and can help normalize and validate your experiences and emotions. Get in touch with professionals. A divorce coach can act as your thinking partner; a therapist can help you heal; a lawyer can provide legal advice; a financial advisor can help you budget and protect your financial interests; a real estate agent and a mortgage broker can set you up in a new home. Your friends and family can provide you with unconditional love.

Your certain-team can help you grieve, interrupt negative thoughts through distraction, motivate the rediscovery of your best self, help you feel loved, and maintain good mental health.

Set boundaries and manage expectations

Get real comfortable with saying, "heck, no." What does that mean for you?

- Set internal boundaries. Be kind to yourself. Recognize and limit negative internal messages.
- Pre-emptive boundaries. Take steps to protect yourself, and set limits with family and friends.
- Responsive boundaries. Manage your reaction with pre-determined actions. Manage adverse reactions toward criticism and insults.
- Set external boundaries. Clear lines you draw between yourself and others.

Setting boundaries is key to reconstructing a relationship with your ex. First, take a minute and think:

- What is a comfortable level of communication between my ex? How frequently, what method and what appropriate topic and information need to be shared?
- What are your marital home boundaries? Who has access, when, how often and for how long? What are the communication expectations?

- What are your standards for yourself? How do you want to be spoken to or treated? What makes you feel fulfilled?
- What are your limits? What causes you stress? Reflect on your actions and your body's reactions. Is scrolling social media helpful or hurtful?
- Examine, are your expectations getting in the way of setting clear boundaries?
- Consider your friend's and family's boundaries. What are they? Are you asking them?

The above questions can set you on the right path for exploring boundaries and expectations. Before you can set concrete boundaries, I emphasize that you must acknowledge your standards. For instance, one of my standards is respectful engagement. I will not tolerate yelling, name-calling, putdowns, or partake in any of these behaviours. Your clarity around your standards will create a framework for setting limits and boundaries. Likewise, by forgoing the expectations you may put on others, you keep yourself out of judgment. In the past, judgment has kept me in a negative cycle of disappointment. Let your expectations go, lead with your standards and shift focus onto yourself. Take it from me; you cannot effectively set a clear boundary if you are focused on others.

I use concise, constructive, kind, and strong statements to set boundaries. If you asked me for a boundary formula, I might start with setting limits. Acknowledge what makes you feel stressed and what you need to feel comfortable. Then use direct communication to underscore limits with clear, kind, and concise language. Acknowledge your boundary and firmly share it. Then set consequences (only those you are willing to take) and share the consequences assertively. Then take action, stating why.

Let's put this formula into action!

- Scenario: your ex is constantly yelling at you over the phone.

Boundary setting statement example: "I do not appreciate you yelling at me (limit). I will not tolerate it (boundary). If you continue to yell, I will hang up the phone, and we can try again when you are ready to have a calm conversation (consequence)."

Take control of your story – it is yours to rewrite

Your story is yours to tell. You are the narrator, the storyteller, and your experiences are uniquely yours. Importantly, your divorce legacy is yours to own, nurture, create and put out into the world. *Think* - how do you want your children to talk about the divorce? Let this perspective lead your decisions in their best interest. Stay mindful of your children's emotions, and allow them to share, check-in, validate and listen to their concerns.

Take the high road! Create the best intentions for yourself by acting with dignity and respect. How? In moments of stress, your flight or flight response may take over, your emotional brain fires up, and you are in primal survival mode. First, acknowledge this response. It is a normal response but can shift your actions significantly if you cannot take hold of it. Acknowledging your overwhelm, find a way to ground yourself (I breathe deeply) and reset yourself for action. Navigate with integrity.

A helpful strategy to eliminate stress is to co-create your story with your ex, alleviating the fear of what the other is saying to friends a family. Telling your children about your divorce or separation will naturally bring up emotions. Co-creating a narrative with your ex for your children will allow you to share the same narrative to prevent confusion and apprehension. If circumstances allow, together as one unit, tell your children, use a calm and soft voice, choose a time they can get the most comfort and reassure them that you are working with one another to put them first.

If anything, get as comfortable as possible sharing your story. Get support from those around you to help you craft something simple, direct and easy to say when emotions bubble up. Repeat your story in the mirror and when you shower so that it can become automatic and separate from emotion.

Here is an example of one of my stories, "we have decided to part ways after acknowledging that we have grown apart. We hope to keep a friendly relationship with our children. My daughter is my primary focus during this time, and I plan to fill our days with as many bonding activities as possible."

Get comfortable outside of your comfort zone

I know; they always say, "try new things." There is a reason; first, it allows you to join a community you may not have connected with but always wanted to. For instance, I joined yoga and fell in love with

Vinyasa and Yin. Yoga allowed me to cultivate new perspectives on what I need for myself spiritually, mentally and physically. I began to feel more aligned, self-actualized and accepting of my needs. New physical challenges allowed me to set new goals and expand on a compassionate framework that led to a deeper sense of self-acceptance. It inspired me to see beyond my limits and create goals that positively impacted many areas of my life. I thrived in this new place, an accepting community, which gave me a new perspective on celebrating confidence over fear. Ultimately, I achieved greater self-efficacy and confidence.

Say yes, rediscover, and find new joy.

Celebrate small wins

You can't pour from an empty cup; celebrate the small wins! – Unknown

By seeing the small victories, you see your path toward reaching your goals. There are countless obstacles during divorce, so embracing small wins can boost your spirit and confidence. Start by taking notice of small wins, consider what puts a smile on your face or helps you gain some confidence, and celebrate that moment. Communicate your small win with those you trust and love. Reinforcing the favourable feeling can help keep you motivated and excited.

What habits can you create to help you celebrate small wins? For instance, daily exercise, reading or journal writing are easy tasks to incorporate and celebrate. Set up a plan to reward yourself by doing something that pleases you and makes you smile. Be kind to yourself, allow flexibility in your plans and deadlines, and give yourself some time to breathe and a little legroom for achieving big goals. Finally, work to stay in the *now*. When you find yourself stuck in the past, catch your wandering thoughts and bring yourself back to the present moment. Be patient; catching thoughts will take practice. Give yourself time to learn how to notice, interrupt and reframe, but when you do, celebrate. To learn effective thought-stopping and reframing skills, work with a therapist.

Create a vision, define your purpose, and become your best self

Create a solid vision for yourself. Craft a personal and professional vision with careful time and attention. This vision will help you take steps toward reaching your dreams and finding your purpose. Allow

your dream to resonate with your values, and contemplate your best life in all foundational areas (i.e. family, friends, career, spirituality, personal growth, health, interests and enjoyment). Visualize.

To get started, ask yourself:

- What is your ideal day?
- Who is in your life?
- What are you doing that brings you joy?
- What goals have you accomplished?
- Where do you live, what does the space look like, and who is with you?

Above all, practice gratitude daily. Find small moments of appreciation. I started by choosing one thing daily to be grateful for and wrote it down. I continued to build on this list, noticing new aspects of life and the beauty around me. Gratitude has allowed me to react with kindness, compassion and generosity. At times, I have sent thank you messages to friends and family. I have shared sentiments with those that inspire me. These moments have helped me affirm the beauty of life, reminding me to pause to experience the windfall fully.

The magic of new beginnings starts today. Whom are you taking with you?

The pathway I have outlined above is a condensed version of my work with my clients. As a divorce coach, I help you embrace your new beginning by advocating and championing you along your journey. Your resilience is stronger than you may recognize, and taking mindful steps toward your best self can create the life of alignment you desire. The magic of new beginnings starts with the power you hold within yourself. Reach out for support and guidance, create your certain-team, rediscover your power, act with intention, redefine joy, and choose yourself every-single-time.



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Dianna is a dedicated professional to support you through your divorce or separation. As a master's student in counselling and psychology, Dianna is deeply passionate about enhancing well-being. She brings compelling insight, brilliant intuition, bonding-in-the-moment humour, loyalty and compassion to every client session. Book a discovery call today.

12

A Mind-Body Perspective in the Face of New Beginnings

Jessica Simpson

As I sit here, I am nodding my head and swaying my body to the rhythm of the music. A classic song titled “Wind of Change” by the Scorpions beautifully links the relationship between change and magic; when we embrace change, we experience the magic of each moment.

Every moment in our human lives is a new beginning. Whereby, each moment is guided by something magical within: the breath. As we inhale, we take in the experience of life in this moment, and as we let go of the inhale, we then embrace a new part of the breath cycle: the exhale. As we exhale, we acknowledge the letting go of this moment to allow for the capacity of the next new beginning. If we are open to the breath’s teachings, the inhale teaches us that every moment is truly magical because the gift of life is contained within it. The inhale can also teach us to be present in our surroundings and to cherish this short-lived and temporary time. The exhale teaches us that in order to take on a magical new beginning, we must let go of the present-moment experience. If we were to base the cycle of new beginnings alongside the breath cycle, these cycles would reset approximately 12-18 times every minute.

I want you to feel and embrace this moment. This magical new beginning is alive within you right now. Let’s do this together. Inhale. You will feel the breath enter the nose, come down the airways, and finally fill your lungs and belly. Pause. Feel the sensations within your feet, embrace the weight of the feet and all the sensations of the muscles and bones that live there. You may experience an uncomfortable sensation when you attach yourself and remain in the inhale. Exhale. let the breath go from your airways with a BIG “sigh”. Feel the belly draw in gently towards your spine, and the weight of your body further settling into gravity. Likewise, if we pause here too long, we get that

same uncomfortable feeling, as our life is dependent on taking in a new beginning by starting a new breath cycle. Congratulations, you have practiced non-attachment, present-moment living, and making this past moment a magical new beginning. Each person takes an average of 22,000 breaths a day; therefore, you have 22,000 moments to make life magical today.

The difference between a beginning and a magical new beginning is our ability to be aloof or our ability to embrace life in the present moment. Fear can cloud the magic of new beginnings, as it continually links us to our past experiences, and inhibits one's capacity to be in the present moment. Fear also constricts our ability to expand and express ourselves. When we have fear, it means we have an attachment to something; oftentimes, these are internal limited beliefs within ourselves. These subconscious beliefs constrict our true expansive and expressive nature while keeping us stuck in a fear cycle. The solution is learning effective mind-body strategies along with guided breath coaching. Having a mind-body coach helps us to be accountable in our healing journey while being gently guided out from the constrictive nature of fear. In turn, the mind-body systems are harmonized which allows you to expand and then grow beautifully.

The breath, when used mindfully, gives space to fear and attachment preventing the energy of these emotions from sticking and clouding the magic which lives in your moment. You loosen attachment and fear because you know each new beginning is short-lived and temporary with another new beginning only one breath away.

Fear cannot stop a new beginning, but it can certainly make the transition feel like an obstacle course when it need not be. From my personal experience, fear keeps us stuck. It tightens our muscles, shallows our breath, and gives us an overall sense of unease. While fear can seem intimidating or bad for us, it actually guides us to our own solutions; the solution of choosing a more nourishing, empowered route. Fear points you to where and how you need to love yourself. Love is accepting yourself exactly how you are today, in this moment, in this breath.

Let's learn a simple mind-body strategy to process fear, emotion, or thought you would like to acknowledge today. As you rest, let's tune into what's on your heart today; let's listen to how your heart space feels in your body now. Is it tight, heavy, or free? Is there an emotion that surfaces here or a repetitive thought that comes, goes, or sticks?

Let's take the advice of Robert Frost and practice his wisdom of taking the road less traveled, for whatever you're feeling right now in your heart, is in fact ok. Remember, it's our internal beliefs that make it not ok. We are not here to judge ourselves or label this thought or emotion as good or bad. Let's welcome this thought or emotion by first taking a mindful breath. Feel your breath join the energy of that thought or emotion like a partnership. What does that emotion or thought feel like and where does it live in your body? Does it make you feel warm or cold? Does it resemble a shape or have colour? When you breathe into it, does it move or stay still? Does it expand, or contract? What state is your facial region in right now? Is your jaw clenched? Are your eyes squinting with internal focus? Let's try something new again, and soften in your facial region, soften your jaw, eyes, ears, and forehead. Let the natural weight of gravity grow to soften your face. Let's tune in with boundless curiosity like finding yourself following cloud shapes in the sky, and the sensation of that emotion or thought in your body dancing with the movement of your breath. I invite you to repeat silently or aloud "The experience of this emotion or thought is moving through me." This statement allows you to become the observer of your experience rather than having it define who you are. You are differentiating the space of who you are from your "clouds" of experience. As you practice this mind-body approach in the face of thoughts or emotions you are also teaching yourself, at a deeper level, that this present moment is safe. When you feel safe, you naturally expand, express, and live each moment with an authentic presence.

Pain Reprocessing Therapy was a method I was taught in my own healing journey, and it helped me reformulate the relationship I had with fear in my life. I believe this method would be better labeled Fear Reprocessing Therapy because that's exactly what this method teaches. In order to reprocess pain, you need to bring awareness to what habits you have that actually fuel pain and fear in your life. You learn to graciously understand and thereby experience your emotions in order to bring new energy in: love, joy, compassion, creativity and confidence. Fear is an emotion that you can learn to track in the body, and with a curious nature and mindful breath, you can loosen your perceptions of fear. The power to heal from chronic pain is not only governed by your beliefs and how you respond to yourself; most importantly, it is based on the relationship you have within yourself and the interconnection with other people. The relationship you have with yourself and surrounding relationships may be making you feel chronically unsafe; feeling unsafe, often at a subconscious level, can invoke pain responses

in the body as it's an innate form of self-preservation. Therefore, Pain Reprocessing Therapy helps to build assertive communication strategies.

I arrived where I am today because of my own suffering from a chronic pain/fear experience. To be honest, I use the word suffering because it was like a living hell. Anyone reading this knows exactly why I talk about it this way. There was no magic in any new beginning. Like you perhaps, I tried a variety of natural and pharmaceutical medications and a very long list of manual therapy practices. I was taking a very traveled road in the chronic pain world by only looking at my pain through a lens of tissue damage and disease. It's easy to think of pain as a consequence of a physical problem. For example, when you feel an ache in your back, it's a natural assumption to identify your back as the problem especially because society reinforces this connection. It was this exact thinking that maintained my own pain/fear cycle. I got out of chronic pain/fear because I embraced a new perspective of what modern neuroscience is now showing; pain is dictated by our brains 100% of the time and based on our beliefs and emotional responses to the pain, the brain records the pain and creates a pain memory pathway which can exist in the absence of tissue damage or disease. The brain can get stuck in this pain loop and habitually fuel the unpleasant physical sensations in the body over and over. Like any habit, it can become more widespread in the body worsening the symptoms over time, not because of more tissue disease or damage, but because your brain has learned the pattern of pain very, very well. This type of pain is called neuroplastic pain, and research has shown that the vast majority of chronic pain cases involve the continual activation of pain memory pathways in the brain. Most often with chronic pain, there are no markers of tissue damage in the body, but diagnostics can display the brain being lit up like a Christmas tree on FMRI brain scans. So, in fact, your pain is real, but its acknowledgement is in the wrong location. As a result, we end up with limited pain relief options because we are overlooking the mind-body connection and how our thoughts, feelings, beliefs and responses to the pain reinforce its presence in the body. While this can seem really scary, it's actually shown in recent research that treatment with a mind-body approach with Pain Reprocessing Therapy has been very effective for treating chronic pain, not just for short-term relief but long-term too. You have more power than you know. Your pain is real, and so is the solution.

After my own completion of Pain Reprocessing Therapy and then coaching others, life has a new perspective now. Life is magical because I choose to be open-hearted and live each moment as a new beginning, not in the absence of fear, but alongside courage and breath. You can learn this way too. My mission is to help you feel empowered and in control of your own healing journey: you do the work, and you own the work. It's impossible to feel scared and empowered at the same time. I am confident you can and will get better when you take the road less traveled with an open heart and a backpack of courage. The only question to ask yourself is, "how willing you are to open your mind?". Are you willing to unlearn your pain and the habitual responses and belief beneath the sensation? 100% of the patients I meet want freedom, but only 1% are open to what it takes to get there. Are you in the 1%? Are you ready to step into mentorship and take the road less traveled for your freedom?

This new year will indeed be magical for me, as I start a new chapter in both my personal and professional life all while embracing uncertainty and all its gifts. Fear is there, but my courage is louder. I will leave behind a manual practice I built over a decade of hard work. Physically I leave it behind, but the lessons, love and experiences I carry forward with me. I will embrace my life path with a goal to carry a part-time osteopathic manual practice and a full-time mind-body coaching practice. Helping patients in deeper ways with a mind-body perspective is my calling and brings me great joy. It's being courageous in one's desires that help one grow and manifest.

Pain Reprocessing Therapy is a method I use regularly in my mind-body coaching practice, and I look forward to all the new patients I have the opportunity to work with on deeper levels. Other mind-body strategies used collaboratively are mindfulness breath coaching and body awareness, emotional processing skills, self-compassion practices, graded exposure and goal setting, understanding limited beliefs, guided visionary exercises, and expressive writing. You will also learn how to expand your energy through activities like joy, play, and gratitude mixed with inner child inquiry. I look forward to being a part of your magical new beginning as we dive in together in 2023. As a sneak peek, I am offering a new 10-session mind-body coaching experience. This coaching package is called the: Unlearn your Pain and Relearn you workshop series and can be purchased directly on my website www.mindfulnessinmotiontherapy.ca under the tab: Unlearn your Pain and Relearn you workshop series under services. This series is offered

both in a one-on-one guided coaching experience and small group coaching. The series runs for 10 weeks and includes a weekly 90-minute live workshop topic presentation, live Q&A, weekly guided meditations, and a 30-minute weekly one-on-one coaching integration check-in. We dive into topics that are relevant to the day-to-day experience like self-compassion, inner child work, graded exposure goal setting, breaking out of the fear habit, body techniques, affirmations, perfectionism, people pleasing, emotional processing, joy, play and gratitude.

If you have a twinkle of curiosity in this therapy but feel fear or resistance to dive in, then I encourage you to visit my website, and under services, book your complimentary discovery call. I welcome any questions or inquiries you have with your specific case.

As you and I embrace this new beginning let's make it magical with a mindful breath, and a pause, I encourage you to welcome what thoughts, emotions or sensations are a part of you today and tune in with compassion and curiosity. Remember, the key ingredients to a magical new beginning; present moment awareness, mindful breath, body awareness scan with a curious and non-judgmental attitude, and loads of practice. This is how we begin to unlearn your pain and relearn you, making this new moment downright magical.



Jessica Simpson is a world-renowned mind-body coach using an evidence-based approach while helping each of her patients feel empowered on their healing journeys. A mind-body approach is used in her coaching sessions to re-establish the link between the mind and body in chronic symptom recovery. After her own recovery from a chronic pain experience using a method called Pain Reprocessing Therapy, Jessica felt empowered to help her patients with these methods in their own chronic symptom recovery. Jessica offers a unique 10-week coaching series workshop to guide you out of the limitations set by your chronic symptoms. If you are ready to unlearn your pain

and relearn yourself and expand yourself back to a state of joy and healing book your 10-session coaching package experience online at www.mindfulnessinmotiontherapy.ca under Unlearn your Pain and Relearn you workshop series listed under the service tab. If you have a twinkle of curiosity with questions about your own specific case book your Complimentary Discovery Call under the services tab as well. Jessica welcomes any questions and looks forward to being a part of your healing journey to guide you back to becoming the CEO of your healing path.

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Rising From the Ashes of My Grief

Julie Derks

Is it possible to have a new beginning in your life? I never thought so, especially after I got that life-altering knock at my door on November 10, 2017, opening the door to a police officer and my uncle, who was a volunteer firefighter. No one had to say anything, their eyes said it all. My husband had gone out the night before and I was already aware by 3:00 in the morning that he hadn't come home and was unreachable. I was standing there, but instantly was taken out of my body and was no longer aware of what was happening around me. As I stood there my 7-month-old had now ended up in the arms of the police officer and to this day I am so thankful that my 2.5 yr. old remained sleeping, unaware of what was going on. The day now seems like a whole lifetime away, yet at the same time, I remember it like yesterday.

I gave my uncle my phone and begged him to call my parents and soon enough my house was filled with family and phone calls were being made to others to share the tragic news of my husband's death. I remember sitting on my couch with two victim services volunteers just trying to figure out what just happened. It was an overload and there was no way my brain was going to even begin to process what just happened. Yet decisions had to be made as to where I wanted my husband's body taken, I was getting phone calls from doctors telling me how they did everything they could, nurses to see if I wanted to come to see him and finally the coroner to let me know how he died. How can one person possibly cope or handle something like that, when just 24 hrs earlier life was fine? The only answer is the protective mechanism our body goes into which is called 'fight or flight' mode. I went into that mode the moment I opened that door and stayed in it for a very long time. It's what kept me functioning enough to get up every day and meet the needs my children still required of me.

Looking back on the first year, I can't tell you a whole lot; a brain goes into something I can only describe as 'fog mode' or 'widow brain'. It's another coping mechanism our body has, our brain attempts to shield itself from the pain of a significant loss or trauma. It would be unbearable to experience all that pain at once. Because of this, I only remember small snippets and it's still to this day frustrating that I don't remember many things. Especially things like my youngest son's first word or when he took his first steps or any milestones my sons hit that are supposed to be so precious and cherished as a parent.

It took me a long time to work through feeling like my husband's death robbed me of those precious moments. Grief hit me like a tidal wave and buried me into a dark hole that I felt trapped in. I had no idea how to start climbing out of the hole and I felt uncomfortable in my own skin. I didn't even know who I was anymore or hadn't a clue what the purpose of my life was now. All I ever thought I wanted in life was to be a wife and a mother, and it felt like my whole identity was destroyed the day my husband died. Each day I merely got out of bed for my boys who still needed me. I put one foot in front of the other and survived. I counted the days, weeks, and months that Jason had been gone and almost looked forward to the one-year mark as if it was some finish line to my pain. I felt like somehow everything would magically be better once I got through the year of 'firsts'.

People use to tell me how strong I was, how they could never imagine going through something like this and they didn't know how I was doing it. I wanted to scream at them, "don't you see I'm a mess and I was never given a choice?". I felt anything but strong, life was continuing around me even when I so badly wanted it to stop. Any griever will tell you they felt anything but strong, I was simply surviving by putting two feet in front of the other the best way I knew how. Some days I was just getting by, minute to minute. Looking back now, years later, I see how we do have an incredible amount of strength within us and slowly it starts to unfold…but it took a lot of time and a lot of soul searching to begin to rebuild my life again. Grief is a nasty beast that brings in an overwhelming amount of fear and emotions that become entangled like a big ball of yarn that constantly consumes you. I for one was not someone who knew how to handle hard emotions before Jason died or how to face any of my fears without running away. But grief throws them right in front of you and I started to see that I could either face them or become consumed by them. A choice that didn't come naturally, in the beginning, I did everything to run from

them. I binged watched Netflix and surrounded myself with people so I didn't have to be alone with my thoughts, overeating and scrolling on social or shopping sites. All just temporary band-aids I thought would bring me some comfort and some happiness. Except it was more numbing and if it brought joy, it was short-lived.

As time went on, I got bored with watching tv and scrolling my phone and I began to get this little inkling that maybe I should try something different, after all this wasn't making me feel any different. I had a question to ask myself, did I want to stay stuck and just continue numbing myself, or did I want to try and face all those fearful thoughts and emotions? It was a choice that I had to make and maybe I had the power to choose how my grief journey went. Now the bigger question presented itself, how was I going to heal from this? I'm so very grateful for my boys, they were the biggest factor in this choice, I wanted them to see me save myself. Death often leaves us feeling like we have no control over our lives. We have zero say in when our loved ones are going to die, but as humans, we want full control over everything. The idea of control makes us feel safe and secure. As I explored more into these choices that I had, I learned that even though we can't control certain things, we do have full control over how we move forward and make a new beginning for ourselves. What better way to honour someone you've lost than to make something meaningful from their death? I needed to figure out how to even begin and coming from a perfectionist's brain, I just wanted to have all the answers perfectly mapped out. Well sorry brain, that's not how grief or healing goes.

I decided to explore activities that had brought me joy in the past and I started with the simple act of colouring. I ordered myself an adult colouring book and instead of turning the tv on at night, I opened a page and sat in the silence of the night and coloured. It seemed very simple at the time, but sitting there in silence, letting myself be creative and find some joy brought in some huge fundamentals for me. The biggest one - being able to sit with myself and let all those thoughts and feelings come in without running away from them. It also brought me peace, calmed my mind, and showed me that I could sit with myself. I was starting to feel the benefits of mindful colouring and wanted to explore the feeling it created more. I made mental notes to myself as to what wasn't working for me and what was working. For example, being woken up by my children each morning, it was challenging to immediately wake up and go right into (single) mom mode.

So, I started waking up before them, first just 20 minutes and I slowly worked my way to an hour before. I started reading self-help and spiritual books, added in mediation, then working out, and little by little over the years I have come up with a morning routine that has given me not only time to myself to help me continue to grow but that I so badly needed…it gave me a sense of control back. I could slowly feel the little shifts they were making in my mind, body, and soul. The important factor is I didn't rush myself; we can never force ourselves into something were just not ready for. If we dive into something just simply for the fact, we hope it's going to be that magic thing that makes all the pain suddenly disappear. I can save you the disappointment and tell you it's not going to work. There is no one magic thing out there to make pain disappear. But implementing healthy choices you have control over will prove to yourself that you really are the holder of your own future, the empowerment will be felt and will take you to a whole other level of healing. There was another important realization during my grief journey. Early on in my grief, I always felt a sense of hope that somehow, I would pull myself through this. I just didn't know how. Despite that small inkling of hope, I was still feeling a little lost as to HOW I would get through this loss. After all, there is no manual to grief; there is no step-by-step guide.

For myself, I turned to reading spiritual books to help give me some answers on life and death. After becoming that person sitting front row at a funeral, you are left with a lot of questions as to what 'life' really means. This led me to seek out different healing modalities to start healing myself mentally, spiritually, and physically. We need to heal on all those levels as I've discovered that grief takes a toll on each and every one. At one point I was asked a question that left me feeling at my absolute lowest. I was asked "who are you?" and when I paused, trying to come up with an answer she added, "and don't say you're a mom or widow." Well, I went blank and felt foolish for not even knowing how to answer her. I tried to come up with something, but I had absolutely nothing. I was 32 years old and had absolutely no idea who I was. But did I ever know who I was? That was the scary part. The instruction not to tell her I was 'a mom or widow' made me realize that's all I thought of myself as. I had always just put labels on myself but that's not actually who I was. Yes, I was a mom and yes, I was a widow, but they didn't define who I was as a person. This was when my whole self-discovery journey really started, and healing not only from my husband's death, but everything in my life. Now the question

became, how the heck do I even find out who I am when I had the wrong belief my whole entire life?

I knew I had a choice to make, dive into the hard work that it was going to take or continue being a victim. We have it programmed in us to play the victim. I played the victim card my whole life, right up until I realized that I had the power within to change and I was the only one responsible for my life. We are all given life circumstances that are not a choice like your husband dying, but it was my choice to how I was going to overcome what life had given me. If I wanted to play the victim I could but I could also choose to take full responsibility for my life and how I moved forward. No one was coming to save me, the only person that was going to save me was myself. Playing the victim was easy, I didn't have to take any responsibility for my life. I didn't have to put any work or effort into it. I could just continue sleeping in until my boys woke me up, scroll on my phone, watch Netflix, and basically just numb anything that came up. But what kind of life was that for me, for my boys? Did I really want to show them that's what you do when something hard in life happens? Just because my husband died, didn't mean my life was over too. That was a big step for me: acknowledging that I had the choice to move forward with my life in a positive way. That having my husband die could show me how to live my life like never before. Making this acknowledgement was a huge step but I still had all this pain that at times was very overwhelming and consuming.

I was afraid of my emotions; they were so dark. What if I started really allowing them to come in and they led me down a darker path I couldn't escape? I never learned how to let my feelings come in and sit with them, so I turned to someone who had entered my life that became my guide. Who walked me through (and still does) my toughest moments. The beautiful thing about what I learned is emotions are just feelings, don't give them more power than that. Feelings come and go if we allow them to be, sit with them, let them show you what you need to work through and watch it pass away. There actually wasn't anything scary about them. I started to welcome my emotions in and allow myself to feel them. Losing my husband made me feel incomplete, I had always looked to him to fill a void. I was always externally looking outside myself to try and make myself feel whole. Something I wasn't even aware that I was doing before my husband passed.

See, before he died, I was living like a robot, day in and day out. Completely unaware, not in touch with my feelings, or who I was. I

wrapped up my whole identity as a mom and wife and that's all I ever strived to be. Even though I was in deep pain after Jason died, something inside of me awoke. It started when I got my first sign from him, it was not long after he had died, and my boys and I were sitting at our kitchen table eating breakfast. We had a bird feeder outside and we saw birds come and go all the time. But that morning, a blue jay came and sat on the windowsill and looked right in at us. Sitting there for several minutes and I just knew. I had this knowing inside of me that there was so much more to life than I had ever realized, and I knew that someday, somehow, I was going to help guide people through their grief. That little glimpse of hope was present.

I still had a very long healing journey ahead of me, but this was a pivotal point. It was this beginning that continuously kept me going day in and day out when I thought I just couldn't do it anymore. All you need is that small knowing or that little glimpse of hope that will keep pushing you forward until you start finding the strength and seeing the light through the darkness. Diving into spiritual books helped me deal with the anger I had towards God. I asked myself constantly why he would take a young family man in a blink of an eye. What was the reason for that? As humans we want answers, and to me, his accident made no sense. There wasn't even a real answer as to why his truck left the road and crashed. That's hard to accept. We talk about acceptance being one of the stages of grief, but that is certainly hard to do when you feel like you don't have answers. The only way I was going to find out answers was by learning more about life and what it all meant. Why are we even here? What are we to be experiencing on Earth? How was I supposed to keep living when one of the people I looked to fulfill me was dead? I read some good books that really helped me. I took what resonated with me from the books and started building my own belief about the Universe.

I believe everything and every person I crossed paths with helped get me to where I am today. They were all building blocks to the foundation I started creating for myself. We feel so lost after someone we love dies. With guidance from my mentor, I began to see how everything comes from within, and my thoughts were creating my reality. If I didn't think I was whole or complete, I was never going to feel that no matter how many external outlets I turned to. It was such a foreign concept to me, I didn't know how to change my thoughts, they'd been the same ones playing in my head for over 30 years. But it was okay that I didn't know how yet to change my thoughts, the first

step was acknowledging and being aware of them. We can't change overnight, everything takes time, especially finding yourself. You must have the desire in you to make that positive choice. At the beginning of my grief journey, "I should" on myself so often. What does that mean? It means for example; I told myself "I shouldn't be crying so much anymore", or "I shouldn't be feeling angry", or "I should be feeling better by now". Why do we put so much pressure and expectations on ourselves about when we "should" be over someone dying when in fact, we will never be over someone who's died? Our love for them will forever be carried forward with us.

So, I needed first to give myself permission to grieve. And not grieve how I felt everyone around me wanted me to grieve. "Don't be too sad but sad enough that they know your still missing him". To allow myself to feel all the emotions come in, knowing they are all valid and showing me where I'm at. And that's where I needed to meet myself. This was a whole new concept for me, so I had to give myself as much grace as I could. I knew that my mind was going to fight this new way of thinking and that was ok. I had to understand that time isn't what was going to heal me. Getting to that one-year mark proved that I was just wanting to get to the one-year mark as if it was magically going to take all the pain and hard emotions away. I needed to find the courage to feel everything that I was so used to running away from. I had to start learning how to be with myself. I need to release everything that had been bottled up inside of me. My pain was simply asking for attention. Giving myself permission to feel and honour everything I experience has allowed me to be open to the lessons that death can teach us.

I've changed as a person to my very core which I now see as a blessing. I wake up every single day knowing how precious each moment really is in this life. I do my best to live in the moment, to be grateful, to love deeply, and most importantly honour my true authentic self. You don't have to stay stuck in your grief to honour your loved one. You can move forward with your life and still hold them close to your heart. For each one of us on this lonely journey of grief, our thoughts and feelings mean something to us, and they need to be explored and validated. Don't deny yourself of that, believe that all your emotions are truly valid and worthy. No one else matters except you, this is your life and you have to believe you are worthy of having any life you want. We all deserve a chance to rebuild a new life from whatever ashes a past one has left us.



Julie Derks

I am a mother of two and founder of Inspirational Healing. I was inspired to become a grief coach after losing my husband tragically in 2017 and through my own healing journey have created a 12 week program that helps others navigate their own grief journey. inspirationalhealing.ca

14

Living the Life You Desire

Alexi Bracey

The laughter and jovial conversations echoed through the massive dining room and down the hallway as I walked to a smaller dining room on the other side of the building - where I was stationed to help serve lunch. There were twenty-four women seated at tables of four. This room was quiet, like a library. You could hear a pin drop.

I did not understand why we had to arrange the two lunch entrée choices on two plates.

Some of the entrees had to be cut up into bite size pieces. Some of the residents had to be fed, some were eating with their hands like a two-year-old.

There was no conversation, no social interaction, no laughter.

These women were all suffering from various stages of dementia, but some of these women were only in their early fifties and IT BROKE MY HEART. I was shaken to my core and in total shock.

I had never witnessed anyone with any kind of cognitive decline, not a family member, not a friend, or a neighbour.

I was already focusing my research on Dementia as I myself was approaching my wisdom years, but this experience put me in the fast-track lane to learn, educate and empower others that dementia does not have to be an option.

As life would have it, situations came up where I was to experience living with individuals suffering from various stages of dementia.

Sam's cognitive decline was exacerbated by his alcoholism which totally deteriorated his brain, his cognitive abilities, stability on his feet, appetite, sleep ability and body functions. At 59, he still had a great

sense of humour and we would reminisce in TV and radio jingles like, “Good ‘till The Last Drop,” and “A Little Dab Will Do Ya.”

His body was being starved for nutrition, but the alcohol was robbing his appetite for nourishment, but the liquid was satiating. His elderly mother was distraught, his teenage daughter didn’t understand why his life was robbed of healthy aging. Dementia affects the whole family whether living near or far.

Another opportunity knocked on my door as I offered to stay with a friend who had suffered a cerebral stroke and her caretaker daughter had suffered a brain aneurysm and had to be taken off life support.

Shock: emotional, mental, and physical trauma. How much can the body handle at 73?

On a nutritional enriched plant-based diet, supportive family times, strong belief in one's Higher Power, licks from a furry family, laughter and gratitude, Mary recovered as best was possible and continues to be a beacon of inspiration to her 7 granddaughters and community.

They say things happen in 3’s.

Robert was wheelchair-bound as a result of a spinal cord accident six years previous. Having known Robert for 12 plus years, I saw a noticeable mental decline after a 2-year Covid visit interrupt.

The fact that Robert is a diabetic, suffers from neuropathy, does not exercise, has a poor diet, suffers sleep apnea, is surrounded by EMF’s 24/7, sleeps with his cell phone in a metal hospital bed is an invitation to end one’s latter days with cognitive decline and loss of independence. This experience, I found very draining.

Why do nursing homes or long-term care facilities all lock their doors? The residents want to find their way back home.

What have all these personal experiences and the research and studies taught me? Dementia is optional and everyone is at risk.

I am vibrant with great brain health living life independently with meaning and purpose on my terms. I am aware of what I feed my mind emotionally, mentally and physically, the friends I choose to associate with, what gives me meaning and purpose and above all being grateful every day.

You have the same choice to make adjustments, and changes to improve or maintain good brain health. You can live the life you desire. The choice is yours!



Cancer saved Alexi's life more than twenty years ago with the knowledge she learned that emotions, mind and body systems are all interconnected. Putting this knowledge to practice and the mindset that "I can", without any medical intervention, drugs or surgery, Alexi was cancer free a year later.

With all the resources and the education she has accumulated, Alexi has helped hundreds overcome their health challenges whether as a coach, mentor, speaker, plant-based chef or healthy environment educator. Alexi is an Amazon Best Seller and multi-book author. Yet another life-changing experience, Alexi now focuses on mid-life women maintaining great Brain Health and living independently on their terms. www.wholehealthacademy.ca

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