



FINDING THE GIFT IN ILLNESS, ADVERSITY AND SPIRITUALITY

Photo by noBorders - Brayden Howie

BY LINDA DIERKS

GROWING THROUGH ADVERSITY

Wouldn't we all love our lives to bounce along without a single bump or bruise? We'd gladly live fairy-tale lives, but the trade-off would be losing those treasured tangles that, in hindsight, brought us the most meaningful rewards — the gifts we find when we rise above obstacles and gain greater insight.

I refer to those days as the “dark ages.” My tragedies came in waves, and the woman who once had everything faced a life spun surreally out of control: first my job, next my relationship, a lengthy illness followed by breast cancer, then total collapse into post-traumatic stress disorder.

After each episode I scrambled to catch my footing, only to be crashed by another wave. The undertow of depression sucked away my coping skills. Unable to work, I lost all of my money and, most precious of all, I lost my identity. My life was gasping for breath.

For years my everyday existence was an unmaneuverable maze of malaise, chronic fatigue, depression, insomnia, brain fog and the loneliness of isolation. Medical specialists in three states were stymied. I exhausted every last option and was forced to admit that my illness was beyond the reach of known remedies.

My pulse quickened with the realization that I would live the rest of my days on disability and welfare if I, alone, couldn't pull myself out of this hole. I let go of the rope and dropped into the unknown.

PEELING AWAY THE LAYERS

I dove in not knowing what I would find but determined to turn over stone after stone until I found it. I laid bare my entire self, summoned help from a greater power and found myself in lockstep with a higher presence reassuring me, guiding me, staying my course through foreign territory. The dots connected as if by magic, the synchronicity uncanny.

And the tide started to turn. The power that I had relinquished to others, to the endless mechanical procedures and medical opinions, was back in my hands. My purpose was my passion, and the pursuit was my return to power.

My lifelong trademarks of grit and gumption served me well. I learned several alternative healing modalities and studied leading-edge wellness and mind-management philosophies.

Peeling away the layers, I found a consistent theme of energy, and my curiosity ignited. I devoured books on quantum physics, learning the energetic mechanics of our universe and, more importantly, that the energy of my own thoughts could influence these mechanics. I discovered the bridge between science and the power of my mind.

Looking back, I was horrified at the mistakes I'd made. I'd ruminated constantly, repeating over and over the tragedies that had befallen me only to attract more of the same — shingles, a bacterial infection, a head-dive down the stairs. I created blockages by being rigid and controlling, and I sealed my fate by defining myself as a sick person. My mistakes were driven by my fear and reinforcing it at the same time. Deeper layers revealed deep-rooted patterns of long-held self-sabotaging beliefs and emotional reactions that were far more difficult to chisel away.

Through it all I fiercely insisted that I would return to the former height of my professional career. I'd regain the identity that I knew. When my health reduced me to my knees and forced me to let go of this work, the anguish was overwhelming.

But like a rag doll with all the stuffing knocked out, I got to choose what went back in and consciously rebuilt a stronger, wiser me. Roadblocks in life aren't about getting back to who we *used* to be but about getting on with who we're *supposed* to be. And it's only through the bravery of letting go of lifelong patterns, and even your identity that genuine transformation occurs. Call it spiritual "tough love."

REFRAMING, RETRAINING, REFLECTING

Diligently, patiently and with kindness, I edited, reframed and retrained every thought, word and mindset to nurture and reflect a new me. And the Phoenix rose from the ashes of those dark ages. I stumbled, I walked and then I flew. I only needed a pivot of attitude to find a new way.

What miracles the flexibility of belief can bring. From life's challenges we see that adversity and happiness are not always opposites of each other but part of a dance, each event feeding the other in an ever-escalating ladder of growth and expansion.

Knowing that there is always a benefit increases your determination to dig deeper, discovering the purpose behind the pain brings justification, and with each success we gain wisdom, resilience and confidence.

In her book "Where Is the Gift?," Caroline Shearer says, "When we recognize our stories are representative of our challenges and that these challenges are solid guideposts leading us to greater peace and love, then we are able to handle them better psychologically and emotionally and also transcend them more smoothly." I have no doubt that my dark ages were direct guideposts to my becoming a co-creator with the universe.

Adversities in life — physical or mental illness, injury, relationship or financial issues — bring disbelief and anguish that can be traded for faith and trust that the universe is operating for your greater good. There is a lesson custom made by a higher source that's appropriate for this state of your growth. Erase the need to jump to a solution and know that the possibilities available to you are limitless.

ASK YOURSELF:

Am I exacerbating an issue by being controlling or judgmental?

What can I bring to this experience that will enhance my personal power or higher consciousness?

Which of my current strengths can I employ to overcome this issue?

Can I change an attitude, belief or reaction, even if it is not my initial response?

Is it my job to fix this issue or to let go and observe the lesson?

Is this a shot across the bow, a harbinger that change is required?

These lessons represent our reason for coming into physical form and leverage our path to higher consciousness. They likely entered our lives in the past in different garb and scenarios, starting with a gentle tug on the sleeve and, when ignored, reaching a point of debilitation.

Can't find the lesson? Where do you feel the rub? Where is the friction, the energy imbalance, the lack of flow? Lose your ego's need to be right and do some deep and sometimes uncomfortable looking into your soul where the lesson can be exposed. The lesson often will come with a flash of realization and will reward you with another rung up the ladder of self-awareness.

The true gifts are the things that transform us. I transcended adversity when I opened up to new possibilities, let go of long-held beliefs and aligned my thoughts and words to attract the abundance of the universal field. I consciously rebuilt a new identity and stepped into my power when I opened to the higher presence that expresses through me.

SHARING ESSENTIAL PRACTICES

I am the messenger, the Johnny Appleseed of these truths, bestowed with the bravery to take on the task, the determination to muck through it and the ability to piece it all together and know that I said yes to this assignment before coming into physical form.

My only desire is to share my good fortune with everyone who is afflicted, to cast the seed more broadly by teaching others. I am the example of its striking effectiveness and share these three essential practices:

STEP INTO YOUR POWER.

Core wellness starts with you.

Be the top priority in your life.

*Build a pillar of self-worth that can't be eroded
by another person's opinion or judgment.*

Know that you are always evolving and building on past errors and mistakes.

Place more importance on being genuine than fitting in.

Do things that make you feel larger.

*Be the maestro of your thoughts. We have the freedom
to choose our thoughts, so choose the best.*

*Develop a daily meditation practice. Along with numerous other benefits it
makes your brain more pliable and receptive to changes in thought patterns.*

*Think about what you think. Every thought and word has
the power to help or hurt you. Choose only positive,
high-frequency thoughts of love, gratitude and inspiration.*

*Break the pattern of limiting beliefs or negative self-talk.
Allow your full expression.*

*Note the words of Ernest Holmes, "Life is a mirror and will
reflect back to the thinker what he thinks into it."*

Build a healing space with love; we heal from the wellspring of a calm core.

*Operating from love erases the friction in life, boosts the immune system,
creates calm and produces a deeper level of healing.*

*The presence of love is the presence of the
Divine as your partner and co-creator.*

*Love raises your frequency to capture the divine
abundance of the universal field.*

In your heart-space you are always safe, you are always loved.

Traditional healing practices and self-help gurus address the

symptoms, but core healing and growth must come from within. What you learn to do for yourself is the comprehensive and thorough salve.

Meredith Young-Sowers of the Stillpoint Foundation emphasizes, "You get sick from the outside in, but you heal from the inside out." Our attitudes, thoughts, emotional reactions and environmental conditions create energetic imbalances leading to disease or depression, but our inner work of love, power and mind management can heal from the core.

Claim your gift. Trust that the Universe is operating for your greatest good. This process of seeking and unveiling is the springboard to new patterns of thought and fulfilling our role as co-creators of a life filled with the divine expression of health and happiness.

The hardest work often brings the greatest rewards. If it can happen for me, it can certainly happen for you. ✿

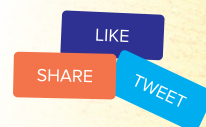
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