

Lessons from *Across the Void* - Finding Peace in the Chaos of Life

In 2003 I was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. Being scared and confused, I did my best to face the diagnosis head on and I participated in the recommended treatment regime: surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and hormone therapy.

Eight months later I felt physically able to return to work, but emotionally, I was pretty miserable. I hated my job, my hormone imbalance from the chemo-induced menopause made me nuts, and I pretty much had to scrape my chin off the ground to face each day. Shortly after returning to work, I was advised of the possibility the cancer may have spread to the bone; then a tumour on my liver was discovered; and a ridge in my other breast on the chest wall was found; and then later, two other biopsies greeted me as the result of two other suspicious lumps. This occurred over a two to three year period, which made my life pretty intense and chaotic. I was exceptionally lucky that none of these incidents were a result of the spread of the cancer, but my "new life" and my "new normal" seemed pretty dismal.

Most days I felt like I couldn't take it. This self-pity would then turn into self-loathing—I hated my life and I hated myself for hating my life. I thought I was a terrible person. I didn't understand why I wasn't only thankful to be alive. I became fed up with my self-imposed wheel of misfortune and decided no matter how long or short my life might be, I knew what I wanted—I wanted peace in my life, inner peace—so I could cultivate and maintain a stronger connection to Source energy during the chaos of my life.

My search for healing began. I read many books, took several classes, and participated in a variety of sessions with natural health therapists. I started to feel better physically, but I still needed help emotionally. I purchased Louise L. Hay's book, *You Can Heal Your Life*, which puts forth that certain feelings create certain outcomes in our bodies: that negative feelings and thoughts can create dis-ease and positive feelings and thoughts can be healing. I sensed this to be true, so in Hay's list of illnesses and related thought patterns, I looked up cancer. To my surprise, Hay indicated cancer was related to feelings of deep hurt and longstanding resentment. Without hesitation, I declared she was wrong in my case. No doubt about it. But I later

realized that my reaction and quick denial was a little defensive, which often meant a button of truth had been pushed. Since I wanted relief from my self-imposed suffering badly enough, I considered whether or not this may be true. Was I resentful? I paid attention to the dialogue in my head, trying to identify if some thought patterns were resentful and I also considered issues in my life that typically caused me suffering. When I was honest with myself—and I was getting really good at being brutally honest with myself—I realized I *could be* resentful and that I *did* have some deep hurt from past events. That honest admission was a turning point.

My next goal was to find a way to get rid of the feelings, thought patterns, habits, and behaviours in my life that didn't support me in a positive way—like being resentful—to increase peace. I realised that finding peace inside would create peace outside, which would allow me to respond more peacefully to life's challenges and to be peaceful in the chaos of my life. I started by paying attention to my thoughts and feelings and when I noticed I felt good, I did what I could to enhance those feelings. And when I felt bad, the first thing I did was to simply *do something new*. I realized that if I wanted different results in my life, I would have to *do something new*. You've likely heard the expression "if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." With that in mind, I realized I could see my life through the eyes of suffering, or I could *do something new*—it was a choice I was making daily as well as moment to moment.

I realized emotions like fear, insecurity, and resentment had simply become a habit—an automatic program, like an automatic pilot. How? Through many years of practise. I wasn't a "bad" person; I had just practised some ways of being in my life that *weren't peaceful*. The good news is that habits can be changed. It's like learning anything new—through commitment, practise, and patience. I saw I could *do something new* by learning consciously chosen, peaceful habits, in the same way I had learned the other ones—and it was just that simple!

Since I really wanted more peace in my life, I committed to *doing something new*, to releasing thought and feeling patterns that weren't peaceful or helpful, and to creating new habits that were more health enhancing, peaceful, and spiritual. I practised feeling differently about events in my life. Instead of choosing to feel like a victim, full of self-pity and fear, I realised I could feel differently. I could accept what I couldn't

change and just focus on improving areas I could. So when I was having a bad feeling, I paid attention to my thoughts. This “pause” then broke the pattern or habitual program, allowing the opportunity to *do something new*. And the first “new” thing I did was to *not be angry or frustrated with myself for having a bad feeling!* Instead I was *grateful for being aware of it*, and grateful for the chance to practise a new response! Responding differently then gave me a different outcome—it changed “what I’ve always got”! Using that process was like having a magic wand—it was exceptionally helpful.

And of course, as I was learning something new, there were also times I forgot to apply this process. And so when I fell back into old thought patterns and feeling patterns and ways of responding to life’s challenges, like in a resentful or angry way, instead of PUNISHING myself by running old tapes about what a bad person I was (which was my USUAL response, thinking that was the only way I would learn), instead of doing *that*, I could *have mercy on myself!* When I noticed I was being hard on myself for not saying the right thing or doing the right thing, instead of making myself bad or wrong because I wasn’t perfect, I realized I could *have mercy on myself, be gentle with myself, and trust that I’ll do better the next time*—what a relief!

These simple steps practised and integrated over time have made a huge difference in my life. Now, six years later, when I look back at my journey, I can see clearly that when I was feeling badly about things, responding to life’s challenges in an angry or resentful way and punishing myself for not being perfect, that doing those things could be compared to walking into a room that was dark and yelling at the darkness, hoping that would bring light. I realised that by doing something new, being gentle on myself when I slipped back into old thought and feeling patterns, and trusting myself, was like turning on the light in my life. When I focused on creating new habits and ways of responding to challenges, *that* is what shone the light of love and peace in my life and helped the darkness to recede.

So I realized instead of battling darkness, I could turn on the light, by:

1. paying attention to my feelings,
2. being aware of negative thoughts,
3. doing something new to change negative thought patterns,

4. being gentle with myself,
5. being grateful for noticing the moments I can create change, and
6. trusting myself to do the best I can.

And those simple steps made it easier to feel peace on a moment to moment basis.

Feeling more peaceful is a process—it takes time and commitment and practise—and it is still on-going for me; it likely always will be. But it is worth it. I am a happier, more peaceful person because of it.

My wish for you is that you may find peace in all the moments of your life—not only for yourself—but for others too. For you are needed right now—you are *desperately* needed right now in this beautiful world of ours—as leaders of peace, of light, and of love. May peace be with you, today and always, and may you lead the way for others.

*Laurie Bonello is the author of the best-selling book, *Across the Void: Through Cancer and Into Life*, available at Chapters, Chinook Centre (Calgary), McNally Robinson Booksellers (Saskatoon), and on-line at www.acrossthevoid.ca and www.amazon.com*