

Choosing Joy

Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results.

~Willie Nelson

“You’re not there for me,” I shouted. “I need you more than ever, and you keep pulling away. It’s like you’ve disappeared.”

“Lori, are you kidding me?” my husband yelled back. “YOU disappeared! You’ve been down and out for over a year and a half! I’ve been pulling more than my weight trying to keep our marriage and our life on track. I didn’t go anywhere. You did!”

They say the truth hurts, and after that exchange, we were both hurting. It had been months since a routine surgery to remove an ovary and its cyst had resulted in the loss of all my reproductive organs. Uterus, cervix, ovaries, fallopian tubes—everything had been removed due to the severity of endometriosis that had been found.

Prior to that, I was in the best shape of my life. I was strong and lean with six-pack abs. I had been a runner, bodybuilder, and cyclist. I was strong, joyful, and confident. As healthy as I felt, I had a few minor health challenges, namely a uterine fibroid and an ovarian cyst. I had opted to have both removed, hoping to alleviate the physical pain I had been experiencing for years. I went into surgery expecting routine results and a quick recovery. I woke to the unimaginable: a full hysterectomy as well as a double oophorectomy. Recovery would take a bit longer.

I struggled both physically and emotionally as the removal of my ovaries sent me into sudden, surgical menopause. I didn’t know how to help myself as my symptoms included hot flashes, night sweats, fatigue, insomnia, loss of libido, weight gain, lack of focus, a zombie-like state, depression, anger, and an overall lack of passion and energy for anything in life.

I had been an outgoing, vibrant woman filled with joy, and now I was a listless crybaby. I’d lost my curiosity, zest for life, and drive. Everything, from getting up in the morning to getting myself through my workday and finding the energy to socialize and maintain relationships, became laborious. Externally, I was functioning, but many times it felt like I was just going through the motions. Internally, I felt out of balance and weak.

The words spoken the day of that argument were difficult to hear, but they served a purpose as they scared me into action. My husband helped me realize how much I had withdrawn from him and from my life. I began to see that, as a result of my surgery, I had been feeling a huge sense of loss, which required time for mourning. It also required a time to heal and, ultimately, to rise.

I could no longer sit on the sidelines and wait for my symptoms to resolve. If I wanted to live happily, I had to choose joy over my circumstances. I had to turn my setback into a comeback.

I combined everything I knew from traditional and nontraditional healing practices, and I explored new paths and lifestyle changes to reduce stress and improve my life’s balance and overall wellness. I worked to bring more peace and calmness to my life through meditation. I spent more time focusing on the positive.

I went to work on my mindset and habits. I became more conscious of my thoughts, words, and feelings. Instead of leaning into my sorrow, I needed to move, dance, smile, laugh, be grateful, and think positively. I had to guard what came into my life and my mind regarding television, books, the news, social media, and relationships. Any area of negativity or toxicity got purged. As I focused on the positive, I felt my mood lighten and lift.

I created better habits. I made sure I got a good night's sleep and then began my day with quiet meditation. I followed that with music and dance. I moved my body. Every day, I wrote down three new things in my journal that I was grateful for. Throughout my day, I would watch short video snippets from funny TV shows. When my husband asked me to go to the movies, I always picked a comedy.

Consciously and consistently, I chose to be happy and grateful. Some days, this came with a decision to be happy before I truly felt it.

I learned that feelings are contagious. One day, I noticed that every person I encountered smiled at me like I was their best friend and said "hello." I thought, *Wow! Everyone is so friendly today. It's like everyone's in a good mood.* Then I realized I was the one who was in a good mood. I was smiling. I was calm, relaxed, and walking with confidence. I was greeting everyone like they were my best friends. My smile was contagious, as were my positive feelings.

The twenty months after my surgery were the darkest period of my life. Surgical menopause rattled my cage and threatened to rob me of my confidence, sexuality, and motivation. However, in the journey through the darkness, I was forced to examine my mind and my thoughts so I could reclaim and maintain my balance. It was where I learned to change my perspective, focus on the positive, and find ways to laugh and be grateful, each and every day.

And every day that I choose joy, happiness follows.

—Lori Ann King—