**The Problem with Self-Help**

About 8 years ago, I went to my first self-help seminar.  I read a lot of books on self help in the past, and got a lot out of them, but nothing compared to going to a seminar, live and in-person.  While books had given me great ideas, or helpful tips, this seminar was life-changing. I wish I could say that after the seminar, everything got better.  That I was successful with finances, relationships, that I was a better mom, more spiritual, etc. It didn't do all that-right away. What it did do, was change my entire perspective on what depression was, and how much control I actually had over my life, my feelings.

Other changes started to happen soon after the seminar, while some others took longer.  For example, about two years after the seminar, I began going to church, something I had always secretly been afraid to do, for fear of being judged.  I wasn't raised going to church. People would know I didn't belong there, right? Of course, I was pleasantly surprised, people welcomed me with open arms, and didn't treat me as an outsider at all.  It was the fear that was holding me back.

Years went by, I was enjoying what I had learned, and felt I was making steady improvements in my life.  Then, in early 2017, I was given a test to see if I was pre-disposed to cancer. I was afraid of the test results because 4 out of the 5 closest blood-related women in my family all had cancer at some point.  The test came back. High likelihood of breast cancer in my lifetime, high chance of ovarian cancer in my lifetime. It was upsetting, but I was prepared for it. Here's the part I wasn't prepared for. My nurse practitioner's suggestion? Double mastectomy and hysterectomy.  This was devastating news. What?? After all, I didn't have breast cancer or ovarian cancer. I was too young for this! I thought this was only something famous people did. I thougtht it was very aggressive, and a little overly excessive. The nurse practitioner ordered more tests.  She wanted me to do a mammogram, and ultra sound.

I went home, I thought about it.  I thought about it some more. Maybe I should do the double mastectomy and hysterectomy.  Breast cancer took my mother's life years ago. She herself had a mastectomy, but becuase of it spreading to her lungs without the doctor's knowledge, she passed away after it spread throughout her entire body.  I had made my mind up pretty certain, that I would go ahead with each of these surgeries. I wanted to be here for my kids, and I didn't want to allow cancer to get a foothold.

I had my mind pretty well made up, but there were still more tests to do.  I went in for my mammogram and ultra sound. I was okay with having a mammogram, after all, nothing was going to come out of it.  I was too young to have breast cancer! Unfortunately...I was wrong. They could tell immediately, there was something showing up on the image.  There were little white dots accumulating on the left side of my left breast. Okay, but it's not going to be cancerous! They wanted to do a biopsy.  I came in for another appointment, had the biopsy, and went back to work. Okay, so something showed up on the mammogram, but it wasn't going to be cancer...  The results came back-I had cancer. I couldn't believe it. I knew there was a chance to get it, but I didn't think it would happen so soon. I felt I needed to listen to the advice of the nurse practitioner, and have the surgeries.

I came in for an appointment with the surgeon to talk about my results.  She handed me the board with the pictures of cancer in different stages. “You have stage 0 breast cancer.”  Stage 0?! What is stage 0?? i had never in my life heard of that. Is that even cancer? Yes, it is. It's when the cancer is still so small, that it has not even left the milk duct yet.  It's still “encapsulated.” The surgeon gave me three possible options: I could have a lumpectomy and chemo, I could have a double mastectomy, or I could wait and watch it. The decision was mine.  I knew what I thought was the right answer, but now I felt it even more. I decided to go ahead with the surgeries.

After the surgeries, I was in a lot of pain.  It wasn't until about 6 weeks in, that I could feel the effects of the hysterectomy, that I was indeed going through menopause.  I was worried, sad, emotional. Problems in my relationship were very evident, and difficult to hide. Why was I feeling like this?  Why was I so upset, discouraged, angry? I knew how to be happy. I knew how to control my feelings, and change my perspective. Why couldn't I do it now?  This was my problem with self-help. I knew how to control my feelings, and be happy, and yet I was unable to do it.

What I realized, was that I wasn't giving myself a chance to grieve what I had lost.  I was sad, I was upset. This was not the life I expected to lead. I thought about something I learned while working in hospice-in order to really get through the pain of loss-you have to allow yourself to feel it.  You can't just gloss over it, focus on something happy, move on. There are times in life where, you just feel sad! And that's okay. It's living there, that becomes the problem. No one deserves to live in sadness as a constant in their life.    But to go through so much whether it be loss of a loved one, a divorce, or a change in our bodies we never thought we'd have. It's important to validate how we feel.

I'm happy to say that with all of that behind me, I am in a good place.  I didn't know how it would all turn out, but it turned out okay, I'm back to being me again, and getting on with the things I know I was put here to do.  I know that my choices aren't the right ones for every person. I didn't write this article to try to sway anyone to make the decisions I made. Each person has to decide what is right for them.  I wrote this article so that, if you're reading it, you can know that things will get better. There are answers out there, and there are ways to make life better. Just know that it's okay to be sad, but you don't deserve to live in sadness.  Keep seeking, keep knocking, and you will find the answers.