



BE IN the moment. (Pixabay)

## 60 really is the new 40

• DR. BATYA L. LUDMAN

I've just turned the age my mom was when she died. I had a knee replacement nine months ago and I've passed the five-year mark since my breast cancer diagnosis. I bought a Fitbit and discovered that the amount of deep sleep I get each night is much less than I imagined. Wow, have I been driving my husband crazy. I recognize that I have lots of work to do on myself!

Five years ago I became a "one in nine" statistic. I walked into the clinic that I'd been attending for 10 years, because of a previous scare, only to discover that this time I really did have breast cancer. (I wrote two columns about it at the time). I hate statistics, in spite of having had to take a course in it in graduate school. Now they say one in eight women will develop breast cancer. In these past five years I saw myself as neither a statistic nor a survivor. Rather, I had a cancerous lump, I had surgery (it was removed), treatment, and life moved on. None of it was fun, but as I've taught my patients who have experienced trauma, the event is now over. It had a beginning, a middle, and thankfully an end. And yes, I had side effects necessitating additional surgeries. Any treatment leaves scars that go far beyond the reach of the surgeon's knife, but they are what they are. If you are thinking: See, it's never really over – what in life is?

### *It's all about your attitude*

Where does one go from here? We each have our story. Though I've left out other tales of pain and suffering over the years, there are definitely far worse stories than mine. We hear about them daily and know the impact extends far beyond ourselves.

What's the key takeaway message?

How you choose to view the events in your life will determine how you choose to respond to them. I hope that, in rereading this sentence, you understand that you hold the key to your own well-being. You may have little or no control over the occurrence of an event, but you certainly have a choice as to how you are going to deal with it. You can see yourself as helpless and the situation hopeless, or you, and only you, can empower

yourself to deal with it as best as you can.

If 60 is the new 40, it's wonderful to have recently regained 20 years. I fully expect to live my life with the enthusiasm of someone climbing the hill but in no way over the hill. I intend to live life to the fullest until my last breath. It sure beats the alternative.

Life has many challenges, and no matter how unexpected, we can and do cope, or can certainly learn to do so with help from others. Yes, there will be uncertainties, as there always are in anything, but doing something, whatever you can do, has the ability to change your situation. It's all about your attitude. With any challenge, the real question is, "How will I let this impact my life and that of others who depend on me?"

HERE ARE eight suggestions for those struggling more than they'd like:

1. Reach out to someone you trust and let them know what's going on. You might discover that having someone else there for you, who cares, can make the difficult moments in your life a bit easier and reduce your feelings of being overwhelmed.
2. Be in the moment – don't linger in the past or in what could be. Anxiety, for example, may be expected, given your past history, but worrying about the unknown won't alter the outcome. It simply robs you of enjoying a state of calm now. Unless you know something with certainty, acknowledge that at this moment you are okay. Don't suspend living.
3. Focus on things that you can change and make a difference in. It might be what you eat, your weight, exercise, time with a loved one, work.
4. We have so much to be grateful for. Every morning, say aloud a list reminding yourself of yesterday's positives. If you're struggling to come up with things, you're not paying attention to the small blessings around you. You just may need a walk.
5. When you don't feel well, it can be very difficult to get outside of your story and help someone else. You might be surprised to discover that the caring you show for them can actually lessen your own discomfort. Distract yourself by playing a game with

someone, visiting a friend, or through reading a book to someone. Paying it forward feels good.

6. Say thank you. Those caring for you may not have the same discomfort as you, but listening to you complain, helping out and being there when they have their own list of things they'd rather be doing, deserve immense appreciation from you. Caregiving is difficult, and your caregivers need care also. Help them take a break and recharge their batteries.
7. Take notice of how you act. Start your morning off saying that you won't complain and then notice just how often you do! Even a minor complaint such as "it's hot" can carry negativity when paired with yet more grumbling that you may not even be aware of. If you need to vent, acknowledge it, state what's going on, think of what could possibly change the situation even a bit, let the past go and move on. You have living to do. Check out your words – are you using words like "always," "never," "must" or "should have"? Work on yourself through kindness and caring, not through criticism and unreasonable expectations for yourself or others.
8. Make a decision to take a vacation from your problems. It can be as short as an hour or as long as you'd like it to be, but when the thoughts surface, remind yourself that you can't control what thoughts jump into your head, but you can control what you do with them, and at this moment, you are putting them in the drawer, and you'll revisit them when you need to. Do you really want to think about the surgery that you might need, 20 times a day? Assuming that thinking about it a few days prior to the surgery is enough, tug on the imaginary rubber band on your wrist and in an emphatic voice to yourself, say "I am not wasting my time and energy on this right now." I promise you that it works.

Life is short. I sincerely hope that you'll work on making the most of it. I personally think that it's worth it. ■

*The writer is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Ra'anana, and author of Life's Journey: Exploring Relationships – Resolving Conflicts. She has written about psychology in The Jerusalem Post since 2000. ludman@netvision.net.il; www.drbatyaludman.com*