



## I'm a Survivor!

I'm celebrating this month, I'm a survivor! And I'm guessing in some way, even if you don't realize it yet, all of you are too! **This month is about celebrating our ability to survive and emerge from life's trials stronger and empowered.** A little more about my story...

It was about a year ago that I found out I had malignant melanoma; a type of skin cancer that can be fatal if not caught early. I went for my yearly dermatology skin check and asked my doctor to take a look at a spot that had changed color, was irregular in shape, and had changed texture. She didn't think it was going to be anything, but with my request took a biopsy. I knew the results weren't good when the doctor called me personally and asked if I had a moment to talk. My heart plummeted! She gave me the bad news: I had melanoma, but tempered it with the good news: I had caught it very early and in most cases surgery was effective in removing all of the cancer. What a rush of emotions and thoughts that followed that call! Cancer has not been kind to my family as I have lost a grandmother, brother, and father to the disease.

It was hard not to let this diagnosis take over my life again. But I was determined to be very mindful of how much power I gave cancer. Building off of faith, trust in the medical personnel working with me, and the power of mind-body techniques I moved forward with surgery and recovery. And you know what? **I not only survived, but I came out stronger!** (cue Kelly Clarkson song 😊). I think there was a reason why I went through what I did. To be a voice saying that you can heal, you can survive, and you can find wellness amidst cancer or any other difficult situation in your life!

So while I may not be sporting any super short skirts this season (and at 40 I'm less inclined to do that anyway) I'm thankful for what the post-surgical nurse so humorously referred to as my "little shark bite" - i.e. the scar on my leg where they removed the melanoma. When people ask me about my scar it's a great platform to educate them about skin cancer. It's a testament to the fact that **I went through this challenge and survived to thrive!**

While my specific situation may not apply to you, I'm gathering you've survived a challenging situation, whether it be a health scare, relationship change, or financial crisis. Or maybe you're in a challenging situation right now. Have hope! **You are equipped to deal with this situation given the right mind set, support, and if necessary, education.**

I'll use myself as an example of how you can come out of a scary or difficult situation and be stronger for it. **Here are some things cancer has taught me:**

1. **Value health over appearance.**

Yes, it's nice to sport a tan in summer, but at what cost? Hello white, pasty skin for me!

2. **The importance of humility; 2 facets**

A) If I wasn't willing to be humble and go to the dermatologist and have her inspect EVERY (yes every!) part of my body for suspicious spots, then I wouldn't have caught my melanoma as early and might have had a different outcome.

B) When I have faith and humbly admit that I need help and can't do this entirely on my own, then I open up space for a higher power to intervene and strengthen me. For.."I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" - Phillipians 4:13

3. **Awareness;** both in terms of how lucky I am to have such a large social support network that rushes in when I need help and healing, but also awareness of where I am already really well (primarily in my faith life, nutrition, physical activity and relationships).

4. **The importance of the mind:body connection** and using mindfulness techniques (yoga, meditation, visualization) to aid my own healing.

5. **To be more attentive to what I put in, on, and around my body.** Getting diagnosed with cancer triggered me to learn more about how cancer grows in the body and what conditions either thwart its growth or facilitate it. As a result, I'm more selective about the beauty and cleaning products I use as well as the foods I ingest.

6. **Honor my intuition and advocate for myself.**

7. **Don't sweat the small stuff** (cliche I know, but so true).

8. **Humor can be great therapy for despair**

9. **Changing my perspective makes all the difference!**

This concept is so important I need to dedicate a couple paragraphs to it. **Our world shrinks or expands in relation to our perspective.** If I would have perseverated on my diagnosis I would have been paralyzed with fear, depression, frustration, anger and would have stayed stuck. I'll be honest, there were times when I did succumb to those feelings. And that's ok. I certainly don't want to come across as implying that it's not ok to react to a diagnosis with emotion. The problem arises when we stay stuck in those emotions and the perspective of cancer being the center of our universe.

What I realized is that if I stepped back and looked at the bigger picture, and all the many facets that contribute to wellness, cancer was just one facet of my life. I was well in many other areas. I could choose to focus on what was within my control to facilitate healing and I could focus on the other areas that provide a deep sense of fulfillment for me.

**So what other perspectives helped me cultivate a state of wellness?** A perspective of **gratitude**. Sounds weird right? But that's what I felt walking into the oncologist's office after having passed by the pediatric oncology ward. I was so thankful I wasn't there because my child had cancer. I developed gratitude for big and small things in my life. I tried to keep my focus on **the power of the present moment** rather than worrying about my future on this earth. Another perspective that was helpful came from my **faith**. When I reframed my experience as that of a spiritual being having a human experience, things shifted. I was less scared of what was happening to my body and felt at peace knowing that this is just one stage of my existence.

**So you see, a challenging situation doesn't have to defeat you or deprive you of your overall wellness. You can survive to thrive!**

Action Challenge: Think about a challenging time in your life and ask yourself: What strengths were cultivated in the process of coping with the challenge? What did you learn or how did you grow? Did you discover any strategies that worked really well to help you get through that difficult time? If so, what were they? If you're experiencing a challenging situation right now, what perspective will help you cope and move forward in wellness?

Stay tuned to [www.facebook.com/wellfinity](http://www.facebook.com/wellfinity) throughout the month of June as I'll be posting tips, recipes, and resources that relate to either preventing cancer and/or healing from it. Missed previous newsletters? You can now view past editions on my website [www.wellfinity.com](http://www.wellfinity.com). As always, if you would like assistance navigating change and nurturing your wellness, please contact me at 319-330-8382 or [shelly.horswill@gmail.com](mailto:shelly.horswill@gmail.com) for a free initial consultation.

Wishing you wellness and a spirit of confidence as you tackle whatever life's challenges are thrown your way!

*Shelly*

**Live with Intention, Love Yourself, Create Balance, Fulfill Your Purpose & Thrive!**