



MEANINGFUL LIVING
PSYCHOLOGY, LIFE COACHING & TRAINING

Meaningful Living Newsletter

Issue 23. November 2017

When the Heart is Broken by Karina Stell

As you all know, I've only recently returned to work after a year on sick leave. I've decided to write this piece, as painful as it is for me, because I know there are others, like me, who have faced the unimaginable, and wondered how to begin living their lives again. Whether you are the sufferer, or the loved ones of those who suffer, it can often be the same. The helplessness and the vulnerability – a dramatic shift from life once known.

My first encounter with cancer was in 2009. I thought this was my biggest hurdle. Hearing cancer and my name in the same sentence. It was halting, terrifying and I felt as if my body shrank to nothing when told. Several surgeries later, it seemed I had won.

In 2013, a sore back sent me to the doctor and in turn I was ordered a scan to see if I had a kidney stone. My doctor asked me to read the report as I was leaving for a holiday the next day and my knees buckled under me when I read the word *lymphoma*.

I think I'm going to die. I see my children's faces as I totally fall apart and realise I must find some courage from somewhere for them at least. I walked the next 9 months as if each foot was housed in a lead boot. Each step of fortnightly chemotherapy over 9 months was difficult and overwhelming. Unmanageable nausea was my constant companion for 9 long months. I didn't die. I thanked God for sparing me and giving me a chance at life.

In 2016, after a scan and biopsy, I was told once again I had lymphoma and my only choices were probably death within a year or a stem cell transplant.

I remember having to tell my children and watching their hearts break. I remember falling into my brother's arms and sobbing from my gut. Cancer could run faster than me and I was never going to win. I seriously considered no treatment. But constantly the tug of leaving the people I loved told me I had to face, as I've said, the *unimaginable*.

I had just met my two grandchildren. They would not remember me if I didn't take this step. That scratched my heart so ferociously. I suppose I need not go on as this brief account of

my broken heart and all the broken hearts around me, explains what life had become. It explains what I had to address. And what others daily with harsher stories than mine must address. How to begin living again when the trauma is over.

I would sit with my dear friend in coffee shops and say, 'what are these people doing? Shopping? Thinking about dinner? Holidays? – as if tomorrow is guaranteed'. My heart felt as if I had no choice other than to just sit waiting to be told again that the disease that wants to kill me was back and what point was there to joining others in life.

As a therapist, I know all the platitudes and try to avoid them at all costs. As a cancer sufferer I have heard even more. Each to warm the heart of those speaking rather than being relevant to those facing the reality of imminent death.

I guess I want to speak to all those who have felt this "lostness", and tell them I understand. As a therapist it has given me another dimension to what I know, and what the pleading eyes of those who suffer want others to know. They are trying to heal, and it seems impossible at first. But the human spirit seems to eventually find a way. A God given blessing perhaps. Who knows? I am starting to live again with the un-knowing of what tomorrow will bring. I can't just sit and wait for what I fear. I want to try, and I hope this encourages others to try too. For those who love those who suffer, my greatest advice would be to just be with them. Listen to them as many times as they need to tell you how it is or was. This is how healing happens. This is what it is to love the broken-hearted.

I hope as I take one step at a time, one day at a time, I can start to heal. It doesn't mean it's not terrifying. As I now relive my story briefly, my heart hurts. But if I can't raise my hand and say, 'me too!', life is unbearably lonely.

As the saying goes, *sometimes you have to fake it before you make it*. That's where I am today. I'm trying. Each day a little more sunshine comes in. To trust in the first step was the hardest – each day is a little easier. One step at a time – one day at a time.

Shame by Michael Cohn



Shame in marriage is one of the most widespread destructive emotions that people must deal with and it is particularly nuanced in marriage because marriage is one of the few relationships where people cannot easily 'hide' and exactly who they really are, warts and all, become ever more transparent.

People walk around with varying degrees of feeling unworthy, tainted, and flawed in some way and they often spend their lives in inauthenticity desperately trying to hide those aspects of themselves they find unworthy. And equally desperately trying to showcase those aspect of their lives they would like to have in place of their taints and flaws.

And the interesting thing is that it doesn't matter whether people in fact do have wonderful positive and amazing sides to themselves - the fact is they will always be really blind to the reality of these amazing and positive aspects about themselves as long as they are blind to and avoidant of those aspects of themselves for which they feel shame.

In this series of blogs, we will look at shame and what it means and how it is avoided, and how it can be successfully and enthusiastically Incorporated with full openness into ones being.

In a typical marriage, two people fall in love and for a period of up to perhaps 12 months both are in a state of pseudo psychosis, both actually having lost contact with reality in terms both of themselves and of the other. Both people project onto the other their 'ideal' mates and, fuelled by powerful hormones, they see only the desirable traits in the other and are blind to those traits which will begin to irritate at a later stage in their relationship.

Not only that but they project onto the other the very qualities

that they wish to have in those partners regardless in fact of whether these qualities actually exist or not.

And so together they build this fantasy which has nothing to do with reality, and some months or years down the line, as reality begins to bite, they begin to notice more and more of the irritating aspects of their partners.

More importantly, they begin to see in their partner's faces, reflected back at them, the irritating parts of their own psyches.

How this plays out is as follows

The honeymoon period is where each looks at the other through rose-coloured glasses and they experience only love, warmth and acceptance, both of themselves and of the other.

A few years down the line they begin to notice that the other isn't quite as wonderful as they previously imagined. Somehow, they aren't as sweet and as accommodating and as warm as they had been.

And a few years further down the line they begin to realise that their partners are actually quite awful - manipulative and selfish beings in their own right.

And finally, they get to look at the other and each wonder who is this monster in front of me?

The terrible truth is that, absent cases of real pathology, the monster in front of them is actually a reflection of themselves. It is actually a fairly accurate reflection of the person doing the looking.

When I look at my partner, the monster, I should know that I'm really looking at the monster part of me that is being reflected back by my partner, and, more to the point I should be looking at what it is about me that is causing my partner to behave in ways that are so painful to me

What does my partner see in me and how have I behaved to induce this? All of this triggers shame and more shame.

It is then that shame begins to manifest itself so strongly in so many ways and it is then that the real cover ups and hiding take place, triggering off yet more shame and more hiding.

We will deal further with this in the next blog.

For those of you who don't follow us on Facebook – a treasure from this month:



Some days it's this way.... some days the reverse - love them both ❤️

Have a wonderful month!

Michael and Karina