



MEANINGFUL LIVING
PSYCHOLOGY, LIFE COACHING & TRAINING

Meaningful Living Newsletter

Issue 13, December, 2015



What 2015 taught me - By Karina Stell

As I sat wondering what this month's post would be about, it just came to me that it's been a year since I finished treatment and it was a year that brought many things to my door.

Most specifically, as my health has slowly improved, it has given me pause to reflect on what I learned from the experience and what I feel most grateful for. It seems timely.

Most of you know my journey with cancer. First in 2009, then again in 2013 – the second experience nearly claiming my life. I would never wish this illness on anyone, but I would be less than real if I was not to acknowledge the gifts I found amongst the worms.

I don't know if I have ever been so afraid in my life. Once very self-reliant, I became quite helpless and had to rely on my children to keep me safe and well. So a year on, I'm so mindful of what my children's care for me taught me. It was a deeply moving lesson in their unselfish love, my real vulnerability and my family's helpless trust. A gift.

In those long 8 months, Michael would come and visit me each fortnight when I was well enough and let me know how our clients were doing; to sit with me in silence

or just be wherever I was. From this I learned about deep friendship, about true empathy and experienced the sweetness of real compassion.

I was blessed with a full remission in late 2014 and returned to work as most of you will remember bald, bloated and weak.

As I had a second chance at life, and the work I love, I had to come to terms with looking a lot different. People looking at me differently and for myself, not being able to rely on anything familiar when looking in the mirror, I felt scared.

I still struggle with looking at myself knowing I carry a lot of steroid bloat with me, my hair like a young boys rather than what I knew and the aging that comes from those healing poisons. I learnt a lot from that experience as I'd always believed that a person was their heart. Now I had to walk the talk. I had to rely on my heart for people to recognise me.

There were some challenging moments and still are, but people do recognise me for the same Karina that was always, and I feel so grateful for that.

Added to these blessings, I had two of my daughters marry this year to men I'm proud to call my sons.

I walked both my girls down the aisle and got to kiss them as I gave their hand to each new husband. What a difference a year makes!

Two short months ago I became a grandmother. There are no words to express how much gratitude I feel for that little boy. So new, beautiful and innocent. There really are no words for how big my heart feels when I think of him.

And so now I sit here writing this final newsletter for 2015 and really just want to say thank you to the universe, to God, to whatever it is that each one of you believes in.

There's a saying that you can't see the stars unless they are set against a dark sky. That's really how I feel. I nearly lost this very special and wonderful gift of life and it feels like at the end of the struggle, I was given an equal measure of joy. Coexistence – how precious!

I want to say thank you to life, thank you to all my clients and group members and I look forward to a warm and connected year together in 2016.



What I noticed..... By Michael Cohn



I, too, get stuck ...

... and frightened to get down to things, waiting for the perfect idea to form itself, pausing for the brilliant insights to become apparent, anticipating the warm glow of success, awaiting my fairy godmother to wave her creative wand and get me out of my stupor and torpor.

All the sitting and waiting, and waiting for ideas and waiting for inspiration and the 'something' which will ... (not sure what it will but I'm sure it will – I think – I hope) is in vain. It is all misguided if it is endured with gritted teeth and impatience.

If the waiting is borne with the intention of creating something, then all the creative impulses are corralled in the waiting pen, the holding pen, and everything gets choked off while the thinking mind thinks about how effective the 'waiting' actually is, whether the wretched creative 'stuff' will finally show itself, damn it.

The trick is to really welcome the state of frozenness, to allow it with grace and interest. Feel the discomfort and experience it as would an inquisitive scientist, utterly immersed in the experience of the experience, utterly curious.

Mindfulness, the buzzword of 30 years ago, the refrain of today's coaches, therapists and mentors, is one of the most useful notions with which to approach areas fraught with difficulty and uncertainty and pain and discomfort. It is one thing to talk about mindfulness, quite another to be mindful.

The seeds of procrastination lie in fear of failure, of not completing the task or of completing it poorly. There is fear

of a final 'verdict', for at the end of the task lie the judgment of others and the judgment, too, of self. At the end of the day, it is, of course, self-judgment.

What to do?

There is a wonderful new anti-procrastination treatment but it has not been approved for use in Australia. It involves putting a firecracker up your rear end but it a dangerous form of motivation, which often causes injury and ignites fires and so on. Also, firecrackers are illegal in NSW so I strongly suggest you take this paragraph with a grain of salty salt and give it a miss.

Given that the firecracker-in-bum is not a workable solution, there is, in fact a way forward that involves, paradoxically, doing nothing at all apart from observing. It is in the willingness to just observe the process, which allows for the opening of what Tara Brach calls the 'sacred space', the moment known to many great writers, philosophers and psychologists as the moment between stimulus and response, which is the key. The practice of mindfulness develops the ability to be sufficiently mindful of the sacred space, to ... just hold still in awareness. It is this moment, which ... I'll reveal more in following newsletters.

Be mindful now of your visceral response to my last sentence.

How do you feel? Frustrated? Angry? Insulted?

Do you rush to judgment about me – idiot? Inappropriate? Insensitive?



Questions I've been asked

By Jonathan Back

Q. How can you say that anxiety is useful???

A. I really understand this sentiment, and initially it can seem very hard to believe that anxiety is useful. Anxiety can feel debilitating and intrusive. Excessive thinking, worry, rumination, and shortness of breath are painful things to sit with.

However, there can be hidden messages within anxious feelings, and when explored deeply and without

judgement, it is possible to notice the more subtle flavours of anxiety.

Perhaps, our system is trying to let us know something really important, a vital clue about our well-being, or a feeling which we shouldn't ignore...

For example:

- 1) Anxiety can serve as a reminder for us to focus on ourselves. It's no wonder that our body screams, "Listen to me!" when we spend too much time focused on the needs of others.
- 2) Anxiety can remind us that we are getting caught up in judgements and comparisons, both of others and ourselves ("I should be perfect" or "Everyone else is further ahead of me in their careers"). Anxiety might be saying, "Hey you! Slow down and listen to what you want!"
- 3) Anxiety can also be a sign that we are not fully expressing our feelings. With years of pushed away

anger/sadness/shame etc., it's no wonder our bodies start reacting like a pot of soup that's beginning to boil over. Pushing away anxiety and feelings is like putting a lid on your soup.

It is always useful to explore the nuances of anxiety, before judging ourselves as crazy for having it.

You can submit questions to Jonathan via Jonathan@meaningful-living.com.au

Last month's puzzle solution:

Do you know the difference?

Group News

New Group in 2016

From Saturday 9th January, we will be running a Group on Saturdays between 2.30pm and 4pm called Discovering You. It will be based on the full Acceptance and Commitment Therapy model as well as mindfulness-based practice.

This should be an exciting Group for those who wish to understand and practice how their commitment to their life values can bring about change.

All Welcome!

Wednesday Groups will now be on Thursday!

From 2016, Wednesday night group will be moved to Thursday evening at the same time of 6.30pm-8.30pm.

This seems to be an easier night for most so hopefully this will be of benefit to you all.

Additionally, from 2016, all Group fees will be increased to \$50/session.

Tuesday and Thursday groups will remain at their usual times.

Carols by the Sea - Bondi Beach, 9th December 5pm – 8.30pm

We're excited! – Yes we are!

Why?

Because we are honoured to be a part of Carols by the Sea this year! Through our sponsorship this year, we hope to get our message out to:

1. Families who are struggling with issues of so-called difficult children (or difficult parents).
2. Couples struggling to find common ground, to resolve conflicts, and to learn again to find the passion in their lives which brought them together in the first place.
3. Corporate people feeling stuck, angry, unfulfilled, whether just personal or on a board level, who want more in life than the grind they face each day.

We hope to see you there!

Xmas Break 2015/2016

Our year ends for
Groups on 18th
December, 2015 & we
will recommence from
4th January, 2016



We wish you all a wonderful break with those you love, and very much look forward to seeing you all in the New Year. – Michael, Jonathan and Karina

Welcome to this months' puzzle!

Xmas feelings-ish!

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Unscramble each of the clue words.

Take the letters that appear in boxes and unscramble them for the final message.