

A Matter of Choice ~ by Roxanne Cole

My journey of healing has been a long time coming and for the most part, I would like to think that it is over. However, at certain benchmarks in the healing process one often wonders: do we ever really heal? Allow me to clarify— the healing referred to in this piece is the physical and emotional healing following a devastating health diagnosis.

For certain illnesses, physical recuperation is possible thanks to the resiliency of the human body. However, the sort of healing that takes the longest is what I call the '*emotional convalescence*' — dealing with all of the emotions that can rear their ugly heads from out of nowhere, especially after you hear those dreaded three words-- not *I love you* but YOU HAVE CANCER!

In October of 2010, I went to see my doctor for a chest cold that would not go away. I was then sent for a routine chest x-ray. No one expected, given that I am a non-smoker, that the chest x-ray would come back showing a two centimeter mass on my lower left lung, and not a simple case of pneumonia as the doctor had expected. On January 6th 2011, I underwent surgical removal of the lower lobe of the left lung which contained a Stage 1 Typical Lung Carcenoid—a rarity when it came to lung cancer.

I healed quickly and five weeks later, I was back to work and thought I put it all behind me-- little did I know how challenging it was going to be to fully recover. The fear of the cancer returning reared its ugly head every time I looked in the mirror. The fear consumed me and I became a tangled web of anger, self-loathing, neediness, tearfulness; I felt as though I was a terrified little girl who needed help.

So where could I turn? I had no parents, no siblings, and no friends nearby. I was 4500 miles from my hometown when this happened, and had no family that cared enough to make the trip to be with me.

It was at this point in my journey that I did what I had done many times before when experiencing a personal hardship- I turned to me, the only one I had, and to my faith. A quote from an old preacher from my hometown in Carleton County came to mind, he said "You can't go down while looking up." It took me awhile to understand this.

I had two choices during my emotional convalescence from cancer, I could sink or I could swim. And after all I had been through in my life leading up to this diagnosis I was too darn stubborn to give in, so I decided to swim.

To answer the question posed at the beginning of this piece, YES, you can heal emotionally and you can make the choice to change the way you see your current situation. You can either make it work for you or against you, it is your choice.

If I may quote Plato, "There is no reality, only perception."

Thanks to the obstacles I have faced in my life, here is a list of things I now know to be true:

- 0 Believe in yourself- You will never know how strong you are until you don't think you can go on for another moment, and then you prove yourself wrong.
- 1 You have one chance at this school called life—there are no makeup tests.
- 2 Take joy in the small things.
- 3 Forgive—take the time to tell the ones you love how you feel about them.
- 4 Always give back for the world does not owe you anything.
- 5 Remember that you do not know a person's individual struggles until you have walked a mile in their shoes. Don't be quick to judge others.
- 6 Give a helping hand.
- 7 Laughter truly is the best medicine.
- 8 Life will pass you by. Don't wait until next year—it may not come.
- 9 Eat cheesecake!