

Learning to Stress Well.¹

Whatever was I thinking?!?

By Mary Elaine Kiener

A year or so after my husband died, I found myself in the middle of an exhilarating, yet doomed-from-the-start romantic relationship. It was like riding an emotional roller-coaster, careening from ecstatic highs to terrifying lows. I compassionately refer to it as my “falling-head-over-heels-into-the-gravel-pit-of-lust” adventure.

The awakening “wise woman” deep inside of me had known the truth. The relationship could not last, no matter how much I wanted it or tried to believe otherwise. Particularly, one evening, when—in the midst of a sudden disagreement, I listened with growing disbelief as he vehemently blurted out, “I know [this...], and there is NOTHING you can say or do that will ever change my mind!” No matter my response, he continued to repeat that insistent refrain.

Back then, I could easily see how his own rigid thinking patterns had affected his lifetime of behavior choices and ultimately his overall declining health. Even so, it took a long time for me to extricate myself. Ultimately, the healing process lasted far longer than the relationship itself—as I also painstakingly grieved decades of failed relationships.

Throughout that ordeal, I learned about the consequences of believing all my hard-won thoughts and feelings about the way I thought life “should be”. Yet, it was only in writing this article that I would freshly acknowledge that additional areas of my own thinking still remained stuck and rigid.

For example, how often do I still notice thoughts running through my mind, such as “I should...”, “He ought...”, “She better not...”, and/or “What will I do IF...?” Odds are, there is an element of worry, fear, anxiety, anger, blame, or even shame mixed in, accompanied by hot-spots of tension or discomfort throughout my body. All of this feeling a bit all-too-familiar, nestled within a heavy, stale atmosphere of “stuckness”.

During a recent internal struggle relating to a new professional relationship, I recalled the life-affirming solace I always find by doing “The Work” of Byron Katie to help “turn-around” patterns of stuck and judgmental thinking. Recognition that I hold the power to choose my beliefs and how I want to feel continues to transform my relationships and my life.

An added benefit is how free and playful my thoughts become. Take the other day. Having woken up to a particularly warm and sticky morning, while glancing in the mirror, I realized how curly my hair was at that moment. While my logical brain reasoned “humidity”, something mischievous inside heard “humility” instead. Hmmm, now THAT spurs some creative, playful thinking—which we’ll do next time as we explore the stress well dimension of “playing and working”.

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¹ Kiener, M.E. (2015, July). Learning to stress well. Whatever was I thinking?!? *Sibyl Magazine. For the Spirit and Soul of Woman*. Retrieved from www.sibylmagazine.com.