

My secret to inner peace

When I was a girl of about seven, my father came up to say goodnight one night and realized I was worrying about things. He thought I was a bit young to be concerned about the war in Vietnam and explained that when he couldn't sleep and had things on his mind, he would think about all the good things in his life.

His meditation would start with health, his family and friends, sports, good books, funny things he had heard, his students and staff, his wife, their aspirations, and he would congratulate himself on how close to reaching his goals he was. He is a humble person, although accomplished, so congratulating himself was a big thing. In essence, he was replacing concern, fear and doubt with a feeling of accomplishment and confidence.

Over the years, I have followed this daily ritual, taking negative subjects and people out of the equation when I'm trying to sleep. When I worry about a particular situation or person, I take that which I cannot fix and place it into a lovely glowing ball in my mind.

This capsule is then figuratively sent down the hall or into the heavens for work at another time.

Our family are all thinkers, but over-thinking can ruin your life, if you let it. We have found that if you control your worrying, it can change your life for the better.

Our feelings, desires and hopes are amazingly powerful tools. Learning to control mine to some degree has helped me look after myself first, so I can be there for others.

When I was 15, I had my first anxiety attack. I was certain I was going crazy. Rapid heart rate; couldn't look in the mirror; an overwhelming feeling.

In talking about it, I found out my father had several anxiety attacks over his life and controlled them by meditation. That helped me learn how to get through them, but I was determined to get rid of them.

I threw myself into as many sports and musical opportunities as possible. After school, I would be at field hockey, then ballet, then off to piano lessons. At night, I would run with the dog or go to a band practice or any other social activity that would keep me busy. I felt that if my body was exhausted, then my mind would be calmed to some degree.

That worked for a while.

I found that by self-soothing through prayer or meditation, I could calm down, think about happy things and change the subject from stress and fear to peace and tranquility.

That inner peace has helped me through many situations.

In our crazy world, it is easy to take on too much, to feel overwhelmed and out of control. Whether you have just taken on a big project, had a baby or are learning a new skill, anything can be overwhelming if you let it.

People's perception is their reality.

I have also learned that taking care of yourself first makes it so much easier to take on the demands of our lives and give freely to others.

As a mother, cycling, swimming or walking the dogs before the children got up, gardening or reading a book, left me so much happier and ready to take on the day.

Our happy family was not given to us; as with many people, we work at it daily. Things happen to all of us, we get through them by supporting each other. We can plan as much as we want, look after our diets, have a balanced life and exercise daily, but things

still happen that are out of our control.

Apparently, I was lucky to have been brought up in a "nice" neighbourhood, within a "good" family. From the outside, we looked healthy and happy – and in many ways we were. Except for one.

At a time, when people didn't talk about alcoholism other than in reference to people who lived on the street, my mum was an alcoholic. It was something our family never spoke about, even though it meant I couldn't bring friends home after school because she might be passed out in the hall.

It was always referred to as her "mood" by my father. I love him intensely; he was my hero growing up and provided an amazing upbringing. He just wasn't able to talk to us about our mum's illness until we became adults. Even now, he will only speak about a few issues, quietly, and never in front of non-family members.

He loves his wife and believes he is here to honour and protect her. Some may say he is an enabler.

I have found, in being at peace with myself, that I can forgive others for what they do or don't do, and come to terms with situations in a more positive manner. I forgive my mum for being ill and my father for not wanting us to know the ugly truth.

When our baby was born with Down syndrome, I had to come to peace within myself before being able to accept the perceived challenge. I had to reach deep inside to find the strength to go on. I had to tell myself it would be OK, that our family could give our daughter a great life without taking away from ourselves or our other children. All before I could even bring my husband in.

It will be three years this Christmas Eve since my husband died. I miss him so much some days it can overwhelm me, especially now that I am a bit more alive again and can feel more.

I can't change the reality of him not living with us. But, I can remember great days that we all shared, great memories, good and bad times.

Fall is tough, as he loved Thanksgiving, and he and I were both Scorpios. Just when I thought we were much better, this fall hit harder than ever.

I have to make hard decisions for our family and future and must keep moving forward. I am lonely for a partner. Although he is and always will be a part of our lives, through much meditation and grieving, I am now ready to move into a new life.

When people share their feeling of being overwhelmed, I explain my theory of inner peace and loving oneself first.

Doing something for yourself every day makes it easier to give to others without reserve. This is not selfish, this is selfless. Loving yourself and looking after your needs allows so many more positive feelings to flow from you.

Things happen and will continue to happen to all of us as long as we are alive. We can greet them with a strong inner peace and calm focus, or not. It is really up to each of us to make your own decision.

I feel lucky that I learned these valuable lessons early in life. I realize that the perceived "bad" or "scary" things that have happened to me have made me the person I am today, along with all the good things. They have moulded who I am.

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Whose Challenge Is It Anyway?