

# why me

## May Be the Question We Need to Ask Ourselves

When something unforeseen happens and shatters life as we know it, the natural question that arises for most of us at some point is, "Why me?" This may seem like a trite question because deep down we all know that none of us is guaranteed immunity from life's curve balls. But, truly uncovering the answer to the "Why me?" question may be the key to healing and moving on.

For me, the "curve ball" was having brain cancer as a young adult. For others, the sudden and unexpected change might be an abrupt ending of a job, a loss of a parent, a house fire—anything that radically changes

life as we know it and pulls us in an entirely new direction. These are defining moments, but take a second to ask yourself *who is doing the defining?* In fact, we do, for ourselves. It is up to us to make sense of our life. This is our "story"—our personal narrative.

*My story:* Cancer interrupted my life right when my ideal career was taking off and I was in love with a man I was hoping to marry. Instead of the possibilities of my young adult years, I was thrust back to being my parents' kid again, taken 3,000 miles back home into my childhood bedroom to be cared for during my treatments. This was my new reality.

Suddenly in the midst of a life-and-death struggle, there was no time to feel sorry for myself, for everything I had lost. It was only years later that I realized I had the right to be sad—and yes angry too—for cancer invading my life. Years after the fact, I had to "feel through" all these emotions I had buried. And, I learned that expressing these feelings wasn't going to make me sicker, but in fact was the key to helping me heal.

I had to make sense of my cancer experience—to define this "defining moment" for myself. Eventually this helped me connect to my cancer experience so that cancer wasn't something that just *happened* to me, but something that was *part of me*.

Maya Angelou said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you." The meaning that we give our experience, the story we tell ourselves and others is what helps us gain perspective and move forward.

For me, the meaning of my illness was my wake-up call from the life I had been living and the key to the life that could become. To me, the life I could create meant making the choice to structure my life to meet my needs. Call it mindfulness—living life consciously and intentionally—that was my turning point.

As I explored the answer to "Why me?" I made changes in my life to get well and stay well. Through a process of self-reflection, I realized

that I truly missed that creative kid I had been as a child—a facet of myself that had somehow had gotten squeezed from me as a young adult. So, I consciously decided to live my life creatively. I also decided to surround myself with happy, motivated individuals who were living their passions, just like I hoped to do. I decided to "say no" to real jobs, and became a dedicated volunteer instead. I learned to play the piano, something I had always wanted to do. I windsurfed around the world. I began putting myself out there in real and honest ways, to encourage people to be that way with me. Not only did I get better and stay better, but this "new me" made me feel alive in a way I had never felt before. Living with the meaning I defined for myself helped me feel the "flow" of a life that was on track, and I felt content and fulfilled.

Although my cancer originally stripped away my identity, it has allowed me to concentrate on the core of who I am and rebuild my life the way I want to live it. Oddly enough, the gift that my cancer gave to me was freedom—that I could choose to live my life exactly the way I wanted to live it.

Why me? Because I *needed* this gift.

Perhaps this is always the person I was meant to become. But, without brain cancer, I don't know how I would have gotten here. **©**

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