

my seven secrets of survival

by Patricia Ezechie



Photo by Marie Lundy Relea of MLR Photo, www.mlrphoto.co.uk

1 Patience and acceptance are two words that are almost anathema to us today when our focus is continually outwards, looking to the next thing we have to do or achieve. But when your body refuses to co-operate and you are reduced to weeping and watching Bollywood movies on your sofa, hoping that today will be the day your energy returns and you will once again be yourself – patience and acceptance have to become your mantra. I spent most of my formative years, 20's and early 30's, believing that if I willed it, it would be so. If I worked hard enough, read enough, pushed myself enough then I would obtain the desired outcome. Fast forward a decade and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and the realisation that no matter how hard I pushed, cried, screamed or demanded it, recovery would come in its own time. And it did. I just had to be patient and accept where I was on any particular day, living in the moment, and recognising I could not control everything. I meet patience and acceptance every day when I get on to my Yoga mat and I am thankful as I am not sure where I would be today without them.

2 Planning is good – I used to be a great planner and still am to some extent, but I have also learned that sometimes flexibility is the key. No pun intended (I am Yoga teacher), but I now have a very clear idea of where I am going, but have lost some of the rigidity that used to inform many of my decisions. I found it was less painful (and frustrating) to bend and flow with what life threw at me, always keeping an eye in the general direction I was going in, but allowing digressions and meanderings to sometimes guide me as these have often made for a very interesting and fulfilling journey, leading me to rich and informative encounters and experiences I would otherwise have missed.

3 Take some time for yourself every day. Create some space, relax and allow your imagination to run wild. I am convinced that the universe or God or whatever is always sending us stuff – ideas, thoughts, inspiration, words of wisdom...but more often than not we miss them because we are so busy doing and running and striving. Sometimes we just need to be. We need to stop and listen, stop and watch, stop and see what comes in. The response I often get when I say this 'I can't afford the time'. I often counter with 'Can you afford not to take the time?' I set the bar very low for myself - all I need to do is take 5 minutes a day, 5 minutes to reconnect with myself, check in with where I am and how I feel physically, emotionally and spiritually. This new habit is an overhang from my bout of illness, but it could be argued and rightly so, that if I had just taken some time, taken a minute or so to breathe and relax, I might have avoided having to stop completely due to fatigue. Our bodies tell us everything we need to know if we would just listen. Listening to and understanding my body, practising Yoga and following an eating plan that worked for me helped me recover from Chronic Fatigue and shed 6 stone. Take a moment and let the creativity flow. Take a moment and get to know yourself and your body, learn to listen to it and trust its guidance.

4 Get a great support network. My mum is my biggest fan and when that self belief begins to waver she is there, banging the drum and cheering me on. I also have a number of fierce and fabulous sisters and friends who are

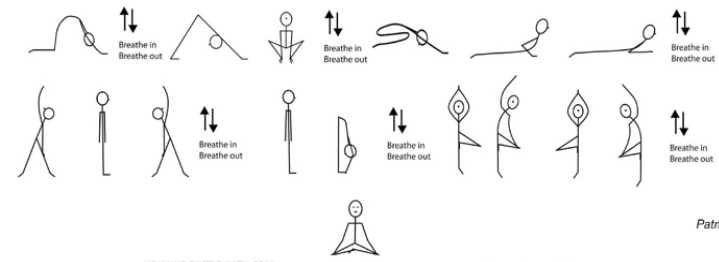
not afraid to 'tell me how it is' even when I don't want to hear it! I am a holy terror for pushing myself too hard, and even after the illness often miss the signs of tiredness and move into that dark space where I am so hyper focused I lose connection with my body. I am lucky enough to have people around me who know the signs and will whisper (or shout if required) a reminder to me to slow down and take a break. Make sure you have someone in your corner, a member of the family, a close friend a colleague – someone you can trust, who knows you and how you work and is also not afraid to 'tell you how it is' when you need to hear it (or more importantly when you don't want to!)

5 One of the most valuable lessons I have learned in the last 10 years is that there is strength in vulnerability. In my last incarnation as a Consultant in business, working in a man's world, feeling constantly under siege (real or imagined), I perceived vulnerability as weakness. There wasn't anything I could not do if I turned my hand to it – arrogant (and foolish) I know! Allowing ourselves to show vulnerability allows us to connect with others as it shows our humanity. On a more practical level it also saves a lot of time and energy! I am learning to allow my vulnerability to be more visible (not easy) and learning to ask for help as I can't do everything myself, nor do I need to. Trust plays a big part in this – learning to trust others and feeling able to depend on them is something that I still struggle with, but I now recognise and accept that I can't do it all on my own, and more importantly I don't want to. And it's amazing who you can meet and what you can learn if you just have the courage to reach out.

6 Believe in yourself, have courage and persevere. I, like many others have been knocked so hard and repeatedly sometimes, I have thought it would be easier to stay on my knees. But an understanding and belief in myself has given me the ability to get up AGAIN, dust my knees off, have a cry, learn the lesson and move on. Believe in yourself, have faith and courage and persevere. What's the worst that can happen – you get it wrong, you make a fool of yourself, you allow yourself to be vulnerable, it doesn't work out – all these outcomes can be survived, and in reality teach us so much and provide us with even more ammunition for our next foray into the unknown. Believe in yourself, have courage and persevere. After all, if you don't believe in you why should anyone else?

7 Be fabulous and shine. REALLY! Tell yourself you are fabulous – every time you look in the mirror, walk past a window, encounter another human being. Embody it, walk it, believe it, project it. I am finally beginning to believe and live by the words from Nelson Mandela's Inaugural address in 1994: "... who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?" Actually, who are you not to be? As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give permission to others to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Poetry in Motion



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