

Overcoming Adversities: Doing the best we can with what we have

by Marjorie Aunos



I never thought I would end up paraplegic. How could I? We can never foresee what life has in store for us. We do what we can with what we've got at the time. When I celebrated the New Year in 2012, I was a single mom, by choice, to a beautiful and very active 16-month-old baby boy. I celebrated with my favorite people on the planet: my parents, aunt and uncle, siblings and my beautiful nieces and nephews. Life was good! After a week of fun at my parents' cottage, I was on my way back to Montreal so I could go to work for a couple of days. As I was driving on a winding country road back to the highway, my car slid on black ice. And in that instant, my life changed forever. The life I knew was gone. Forever. All that was left was a big mountain to climb and my will to parent my child the best way I could. But it also meant that I needed to figure out how I would be managing that. Adversity - big or small - happens to us all the time. This is what life brings. Joy and happiness and hurdles. What we have to do then is learn how to navigate between the two. And, most importantly, we have to learn to tell our stories in the most empowering ways.

Narration and Storytelling

When I became paraplegic, all I could say was: this thing happened to me and I couldn't do anything about it. I was the unfortunate victim of a car accident. That victim had pity on her old self and saw having a disability as an unfortunate turn of events. I even attributed to myself many qualifiers stereotypically associated with being disabled and frail. I believed I was no longer able to achieve my goals and that I could no longer contribute significantly to society. Saying these words made me even more vulnerable and weak. I was stuck in a rut and was not able to get out of my head.

Nine years later, a friend from high school asked me if she could interview me for her podcast. She wanted to empower other moms and thought my story would be inspiring to many. I accepted out of friendship, yet with much doubt: I knew I hadn't been able to inspire myself, so how could I inspire others? This is when I started speaking about this life-changing event. And the more I talked, the more I saw people listening. Each person was attentive to how I had overcome adversity. As I saw how the stories I told others had an impact on them, I thought maybe I needed to listen to my stories more carefully. This is when I realized I had to be careful how I framed those stories.

Gaining perspective on the impact of storytelling reminded me of my psychology training. In recounting our stories, we can focus on different angles, shaping how the story is being told. Each of these versions then triggers a different set of emotions.



The moment I recognised my own strengths was the moment I was able to move away from feeling pity for me, and when I felt empowered by my own story. This is my hope for anyone: focus on recognising your own strengths and speak about your journey with the acknowledgement that you too have gone through a lot and have survived it all.

I needed to choose carefully not only what story I would tell but, most importantly, how I narrate it and how I share it with others.

Inspiration comes from within

We can all draw wisdom from watching others handle the adversities in front of them. Yet it is even more powerful to draw inspiration from our own stories.

I started feeling stronger in my resolve to live a good life when I saw that my love for my son helped me survive, that my faith gave me hope and that prudence protected me while I waited to be rescued. I had never been powerless, nor helpless.



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