

**Creative Coping:
Creative Strategies to Cope With the Stress that Comes with a Cancer Diagnosis**

With:

Hanna Kreiner, Psychotherapist, Author

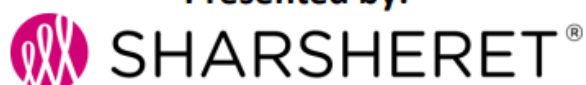
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Linda Pressman, Author, Educator

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Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much for joining us tonight. My name is Melissa Rosen. I am the Director of Training and Education at Sharsheret and I just want to tell you that tonight you are in for something special. In fact, tonight's webinar acknowledges that we are all unique and deal with our cancer experiences differently. But before we begin, I have just a couple of housekeeping items to take care of. First, I want to thank Daiichi Sankyo, GSK, Merck and the Cooperative Agreement DP 19-1906 of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Their generosity allows us to continue to offer important support and educational webinars such as tonight's program.

I want to thank tonight's program partners, and welcome everybody who joined from the Woman to Woman program at Mount Sinai. This a reminder that tonight's webinar is being recorded and will be posted on Sharsheret's website along with the transcript. As always, participants' names and faces will not be in the recording. We did actually receive some great questions through the registration process, but I suspect that questions will arise for our presenters during the course of the webinar. So, please use the chat box to enter your questions and we will address them at the Q&A session toward the end of the program. As a reminder, Sharsheret has been providing telehealth services to the breast and ovarian cancer communities for over 20 years, because cancer is so much more than a physical experience. And as we move into tonight's webinar, I want to remind you that we're a national non-profit and support organization that does not provide any medical advice or perform any medical procedures. The information provided by Sharsheret is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment for a specific medical condition.

As always, you should seek the advice of your physician or qualified healthcare provider with any questions you may have regarding your particular medical condition. We have a lot to explore tonight, so let's get started. We know, as I mentioned, that cancer is a physical experience. That much is clear. And for those impacted by cancer, we understand it is also an emotional experience. For many, cancer can also be a spiritual experience because it has us asking some big questions. We have our healthcare teams to help us recover from the physical impact of cancer and cancer treatment. And luckily we have the Sharsheret team of social workers to help us work through the emotions that surround our cancer experiences. But healing from cancer is not linear and is often complicated. Luckily, there are a lot of things we can engage in that will help us process the difficult experience of cancer.

And each of us finds what works for us. It doesn't have to be just one thing. In this webinar, we have two wonderful presenters, who are going to focus on two specific modalities, writing and meditation. We'll each explore and expand our familiarity with these art forms to see how they might help us on this journey. But I don't want you to think that these are the only two, or even the best two. Some people practice yoga, others paint, some dance, some pray, and some run. Some find time in nature to be healing, while others choose to volunteer and give back to the communities that have supported them while they were ill. We had a speaker on our Beyond Surviving webinar last week that shared that she saved every single bracelet or hospital band she received while in treatment and created this beautiful piece of artwork using them. She actually showed it to us, symbolizing the turning of a traumatic experience into something more.

If we have time, we'll talk even more about these options toward the end of tonight's program. But I want us to get to our presenters. We are so very fortunate to have both of our speakers here with us today. The first to present is Hanna Kreiner. Hanna is a licensed psychotherapist, author, and teacher of mindfulness and self-compassion. She discovered mindfulness and meditation while training and working as an oncology social worker, and has found mindfulness to be a strong foundation in facing

life's greatest challenges with more ease. Her personal practice informs her work providing integrative psychotherapy, offering mindfulness meditation programming for groups and teaching mindful self-compassion courses. You'll see, she brings warmth, humor, insights, and authenticity to her work with individuals, groups, and corporate clients. You can learn more about Hanna's work at her website, hannakreiner.com, on Instagram [@seattleselfcompassion](https://www.instagram.com/seattleselfcompassion), and check out her books, a *Self-Compassion Journal for First Time Moms: Prompts and Practices to Nurture Kindness and Self-Care*, wherever books are sold. Hanna, the floor is yours.

Hanna Kreiner:

Thank you so much, Melissa. Hello, everybody. Welcome, and it's such an honor to be here with you all. Thank you for that lovely introduction. And what better way I can talk about this creative coping of meditation and mindfulness and self-compassion, but there's only so much... I can describe an apple before I just want to hand you an apple and you can take a bite. So, let's practice together. If you feel comfortable doing so, go ahead and find a comfortable posture that you can sit in quietly for a moment and close your eyes, if that feels okay, or just take a soft gaze down.

Now that we're all physically present, I just want to help invite the hearts and minds to join us here in this moment too. We can begin by simply listening to the sounds in the room, wherever you are, just sitting in the midst of the sounds and letting them come to you. In your mind's eye, finding your own body in the room and perhaps welcoming yourself, greeting yourself with an inner smile, the way you might welcome a dear friend you haven't seen in a while. Inclining your attention towards yourself, the way you might lean in for a hug for someone that you care about.

And now, dropping your attention inside the body and feeling whatever's happening in your body right now. Aware of all sensations that are here. There may be ease and softness, warmth, coolness. There might be tension. Feel the pressure of your body against the chair. Your feet on the ground, everything's allowed. So, notice now if you feel anything pleasant in your body. If you do, can you take a moment to appreciate and savor that which feels good in your body in this moment? Allowing yourself to feel however you do. Now, checking in if you feel anything unpleasant in the body.

These human bodies tend to have unpleasant feelings. So, if there are some, can you make some space for them? Can you allow them to be here too? If only just for this moment. Instinctively, we wish we didn't have these difficult sensations and yet, we do. So, can you just let them be for the next moment? And remember that you're not alone. Any uneasiness and discomfort that you feel is part of our human condition, and especially in this space, surrounded by over 90 people, you are among friends, people who understand how you feel inside. So, if there's any discomfort inside, can you let your heart soften a little bit? Just be a little bit more tender, simply because there is that discomfort, not because it's going to make it go away, but softening the way that you might soften when you see a kid who's just fallen down or someone who's got the flu.

Or maybe you can offer yourself some words of encouragement like, "Hey, it's okay, you can handle this." As we close this practice, can you offer yourself some appreciation? The effort and the intention that came with just showing up today. This in itself is an act of intention-setting, of mindful awareness, and of self-compassion. So, when you feel ready, go ahead and gently open your eyes. And if you're open to it, please, share in the chat box how you feel after doing a practice like that. Just one or two words are fine. So, thank you all for doing something maybe new to you. Maybe you've done meditation before or maybe this is the first time you're in the right spot and there's no experience necessary for you to benefit from mindfulness and meditation. Thank you all for the comments. I see someone said, "I need more." More aware. Lighter. Relaxed. Peaceful. Mellow.

So, this is a possibility inside you at all times really, to feel a little bit more at ease. It's a resource that you have inside that's there, and meditation is a way to access that. So, when asked to speak today, I was asked to speak to what is meditation. And there are so many different kinds. What I'll focus on is mindfulness meditation and self-compassion practices. Because that's what I feel that I have the most to offer. All different kinds of meditation do share the same intention though, which is one of cultivating awareness of the present moment. And people talk a lot about being in the present moment, and sometimes it can feel like it's lost. Why? Why do we even want to be in the present moment, especially when we're going through something really tough? Well, the research shows that when you are in the present moment, you're neurologically more at ease, that you are less activated and more in a state of calm.

And also, you might be able to just tell from your own experience that when you are activated, anxious, depressed, or going through difficulty, those things tend to be focused on things that have happened in the past, ruminating about things that have already happened or worries and concerns, anxiety about what's to come, the unknown. When we're in this moment, the one right now, so just feeling with me, your feet are on the ground, your heart is beating inside you, your lungs are filled with breath. In this moment, things are okay. They might not be great, sure, but they're okay. And generally our more difficult aspects of worry, concern, low feelings, the rollercoaster of emotions, this happens when our minds go into the past or the future, or when our minds add a narrative to what we're going through. And so, meditation and mindfulness help us strip away all of that and get down to the facts and what we can see and feel in this moment.

So, that's why it can be so helpful. When we fill our lives with more and more awareness of these moments, like this moment where things are okay, then it really shifts the way that we experience our lives to be one that feels generally stable, where we feel like we have resources inside, rather than a mixture of moments where our minds are wandering and we feel lost in the past or the future. So, I wanted to share... I'm just going to check my notes to make sure if I'm hitting all the main topics. So, the way we talk about our life can also add to our struggles. So, even when we're not in the past or the future in our minds, we can often be adding judgment and stories or narratives around what we're going through now. So, it's really common and natural to have a response when one is diagnosed with cancer or facing a setback with their treatment to say something or to think something along the lines of, "This isn't supposed to happen."

I think we can all have a lot of compassion and understanding about that thought. From a mindfulness perspective, I can try to give more space to that and say that from a mindfulness lens, all experiences are allowed. We don't need to welcome them or embrace them, but in the human condition, these things happen as well. And so, a mindful reframe could be something like, not that this isn't supposed to happen, but rather, "This is happening." And just being with something at its most essential. And it doesn't mean that we need to deny how we're feeling. It's so important to do so. And so, coming back to yourself and noticing how you feel could be something like, "I'm scared." Or, "I feel determined to do everything I can do."

And so, it takes it away from something that has gone wrong, as if there was a path that then you've gotten thrown off of, to being like, "This is the new path that I'm on, and this is how I feel in this moment." And just taking stock, just moment by moment. So, you're kind of building your path one brick at a time, rather than imagining that it's laid out in front of you and that it's all preordained. You just take it one step at a time. This can feel really disorienting to people, but ultimately people tell me, and the research shows that they feel more empowered this way, by taking it one step at a time.

So, the mindful piece is really being with the present moment just as it is, with openness and curiosity, and without judgment. So, you're not saying it's good or bad, you're just saying the facts. This is how it is.

And to help you do that, and also to help support yourself through any of life's struggles, self-compassion is really key. Self-compassion is essentially being with yourself the way you would be to someone that you cared about, like a friend. So, you can think often about how you're talking to yourself. And then check-in, "Is that how I would talk to a friend?"

Usually, there is a disconnect. So, I wanted to offer another practice to take us through to the end of my presentation, and it's called a self-compassion break. And in the follow-up email, I'll send you a link to the guide so that you can do this for yourself. This is a self-compassion break, and **compassion is a feeling that you get when love meets something difficult**. So, we here in this group are no strangers to life's difficulties. So, I'm going to ask you to think of something difficult, but because we're just learning this, I want you to learn in the shallow end of the pool. So, try to think of something that is not the most difficult or most activating thing for you right now, but think of something that's kind of bothering you. It could be a relationship issue, it could be a missed appointment, it could be lost keys.

Try to think of something that you can kind of get your hands around, so that we can build some confidence as we learn. And then you can expand this to other parts of your life. So, go ahead and think of something. And this doesn't have to be a written exercise, but afterwards you can jot down some notes if you like. Go ahead and close your eyes if that feels okay. And as you think about this difficult situation, a struggle you're going through, you can notice in your body how that feels. Likely, there's some discomfort, because our bodies recognize that something doesn't feel good. And you can notice that in your body. This is a way of practicing mindfulness because the body's always in the moment.

You can say to yourself just the facts, which is, "This is a struggle. This is hard." You might even say, "This sucks." Just call it what it is. And in mindfulness, we don't add to things. So, we're not saying this is the worst thing that's ever happened, but we're also not going to minimize. If you notice a part of you saying, "Oh, but other people have it worse," try to pause that and just let it be. This is a moment of struggle. So, this is the mindfulness, this is the first part. We're being mindful of the struggle.

The second part is key. This is the common humanity. So, recognize that we are in this group, 90 people, and there are billions of people on this planet. Whatever you're feeling right now, you are not the first person to feel this way and you are not the last. Whatever you feel right now is part of the human experience. Whatever happened to you is part of the human experience. And however, you're responding to it is a natural and normal way for any human to respond. So, you can allow yourself to say, "I am in this moment, just like any other person. It is hard and I am responding to it just like anyone else would." And if it feels like a really hard and unfamiliar territory, you can sort of have the perspective of, "Wow, this is what it feels like for a person to go through something like this." And know that in that, you are actually deeply connected to so many people. Our struggles bring us together.

So, knowing that you're not alone and that any difficulty you're feeling is just a sign of your own humanity, I invite you now to bring a hand to your heart or maybe a palm to your cheek or give yourself a hug, something that feels good. If it feels weird, you don't have to do it. And let the intention of that touch be one of friendship, the way you might touch a friend. And I invite you now to say something nice inside, to be kind, to be kind about the struggle you're going through, like, "May I have patience with myself. May I love myself even when I screw up. May I love myself no matter what. May I be kind to myself." Or you can say something more encouraging, like, "I can do this. I will get through this. I know I am strong. I know I have support."

When things don't feel so certain and encouraging like that, you can just say, "May I be with myself, just as I am. May I accept myself in this moment, just as I am." And that's self-kindness. If it feels awkward, then that's your common humanity. Again, we're not really used to doing this kind of self-kindness. So, as you open your eyes, we just did a self-compassion break. We practiced mindfulness, we connected to our common humanity and we practiced self-kindness. There's a three-parter for you, and I'll follow up,

like I said, with more resources. But this is something that can be a practice and a meditation, a guided meditation. I'll send you some recordings. And it's something that you can also, once you've done it a couple of times, you can do it in the moment. You can do it when you're in your treatment chair. You can do it when you're walking from your car to the hospital. You can do it when you're on the phone with someone and they say something totally tone-deaf to you about your experience. There are so many ways you can make this a formal practice and an informal practice.

So, I want to be respectful of the time, because I know we're fitting in a lot tonight. So, I'm going to close there and we'll do Q&A in a little bit, and I want to pass it on to Linda. Thank you.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much, Hanna. One of the things that we think is that I don't believe in this mindfulness stuff. Or with Linda coming up, I'm not a writer. I can't do that. But even for those of us who aren't necessarily comfortable with mindfulness and self-compassion, I know that I felt when you asked us to think about something, I could feel my stomach change. And mindfulness isn't something that I normally do. Although it didn't change what I was thinking about, I did feel like, okay, I can do this. I'm adding something positive to the situation I was thinking about. So, even for people who haven't done it, wow, what an impact. Thank you so much. Okay. And we already have questions for you, so we will welcome you back shortly.

Our next presenter is Linda Pressman. Linda is the author of *Jewish Girls Gone Wild*, and *Looking Up: A Memoir of Sisters, Survivors & Skokie*, which won the grand prize in the Writer's Digest 20th Annual Contest and is a part of the permanent collections of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem and the US Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, as well as the National Library in Israel. And I know that those of you who are Chicago area based, your ears perked up when you heard the title of that. Maybe she'll tell us more about that. I will tell you though, that Linda's freelance writing has appeared in Newsweek, where she published about her own cancer experience, the Times of Israel, on Kveller, along with many other venues. She teaches life stories classes for Scottsdale's Arts and on an individual basis. And she can be reached through her website, which is going right into the chat right now, lindajpressman.com. Linda, thank you so much for being here.

Linda Pressman:

Hi, everyone. Thank you, Melissa.

Thank you, Melissa for that introduction. And thank you, Hanna, for coming before me and mentioning two things that I am going to mention about writing, which are moments and the bricks. My second book is actually called, *Jewish Girls Gone Wild*. Interestingly, the thing that brought me to writing was that I had a brain tumor in 2001. And the thing that brought me to publishing my second book was having breast cancer, because I actually published it the night before my double mastectomy. I think of writing as something where we're always kind of not recognizing that we have a story, where it's too much to write, it's just overwhelming, or we don't know how to find the story. Or let's say we journal, and journaling seems to be the writing that we're meant to do about it. And I am a journaler. I believe in it. I do it every day.

However, my journaling is for personal reading only. And when I shape a story out of my life, it doesn't have to be read by other people, but it could be read by other people. Like the story that I published in Newsweek about how my breast cancer diagnosis led to two of my sisters also being diagnosed. As a writer, my brain will just start noticing odd things that have happened or weird places that I am. Normally, when something happens to me, I need time and I need distance from the story to write it. But

when I had breast cancer, I found that I needed to write, right then. I was visiting a land that nobody wants to go to. I was an unwilling visitor, and I'd walked through this door and I didn't want to be there.

But while I was there, I could use sharp observations to kind of communicate to the rest of the world what it's like. So, I guess what I try to do with writing and when I teach writing is that for writing not to be overwhelming, we have to make it small. If I think that I have to write the whole story of my whole life, or I have to write about this breast surgery, that breast surgery, blah, blah, blah, implants, numbness, it's too much. So, I have writing exercises that are intended to bring us down to a moment, like what Hanna said. If you were going to write a story about let's say a whole city, sometimes the camera would be out at the city level, where you're describing things and then the camera goes in for close-ups, till you're on your house and sometimes you're on the brick of the house. And that also tied into Hanna's talk. And that sometimes the smallest moment will actually reflect the entire story. So, the first writing exercise we're going to do, and I'm just going to give a minute for it. Okay? I'm going to describe them so you can use them later and I'll provide follow-up information.

But one of the most amazing exercises that have led to a lot of writing for me is a tiny timeline. We all know what a timeline is, and a timeline can be very overwhelming, it can be, I got married, I got divorced, I got married again, blah, blah, blah, child born. But I use the tiny timeline. So, maybe my timeline is actually my cancer, just the cancer from start to finish. Or maybe the timeline is the chemo story from start to finish. It could be the rooms that the cancer took you to. I had to go to a hyperbaric chamber, I had to go to the plastic surgeon's office, I had to go to the breast surgeon's office. I had to go to excruciating biopsies. What's the view from the room? And that is another exercise I do with students, which is the view from. What's the view from?

And now that I'm thinking about it, I think about the view from the biopsy chair. If I'm going to be taken to a place that I never wanted to be in, at least I'm going to write the story of what it was like to be there. I couldn't avoid the writing. I am a writer, so when writing shows up, I don't ignore it, I write it down. So, I mentioned the tiny timeline and the view from, and there's also an exercise I use, which is called the before and after. So, it'd be like, here's the before, and then this one day happens when you get the diagnosis. And here's the after. And the after doesn't look anything that the before thought it was going to look like, right? Because I think for me, I know I thought that having a brain tumor was enough. I thought I had suffered enough. So, I didn't really expect another diagnosis. It was almost like an unspoken deal I had with the universe that I'd already had my big thing.

So anyway, before and after. And then one other exercise I normally use is called the rules. And the rules are like, what are the rules of being a good patient? What are the rules of the chemo lounge? What are the rules of getting a wig? Or what's the rule... I had to go to hyperbaric treatment for a month. What are the rules of the hyperbaric chamber? And so, sometimes when I list the rules that have existed in my life at a certain time, it helps to evoke that world and it helps to kind of heal me. I have to say, writing and putting a shape to my stories and understanding that as a writer, maybe I'm the only person who's going to report on this, has really helped me in my own recovery from cancer.

To me, I always feel like I'm spending a lot of time trying to convince my students that they have a story that's worthwhile. And I want to tell everyone here, this story is worthwhile, even if it's only for you, even if it's for you and your spouse or your children, or even if nobody ever reads it. The idea of creating this story that tells a larger story about life and death and suffering and being happy again, or being happy in the middle of suffering, all these crazy contradictions that come about with cancer, those are yours to tell. So, right now, we're going to take a minute and just draw several tiny timelines on a sheet of paper.

You see how it's just a tiny little sheet, tiny little lines? Don't think of it as everything, and you can label these. So, maybe I want to label, maybe my tiny timeline's going to be the story of my breasts from age

12 when they showed up, to age 61 when they went away, and what kind of world I'm living in post, with reconstruction. It could be the story, it's just only a tiny segment. It could be the chemo story, it could be a hair story, where hair fell out or wigs or something like that. It's the story that only you can tell, because only you saw it in this particular way. One of the first things I started writing was how impossible it was that I had gone through 20 years of mammograms, and I expected that every single one of them would end up being okay. And suddenly, I was ushered into the nurse navigator suite, and I was handed a bag that said Susan G. Komen on it.

It was like I was kicking and screaming inside because I didn't want to be there. I think a lot of my cancer experience was how much I don't want to be there. I don't want to go to the oncologist's office. I don't. I want to go to the physical therapy place next door. I do not want to be the one walking in there. So, writing lets me say those things that sometimes nobody's saying. So anyway, we're going to use whichever one of those things you want. You can do the tiny timeline. You can do the before and after. The before and after is probably a little bit easier. And you can describe the before. And then, how it contrasts. Sometimes it's a comparison, contrast. And so, I'll just set a timer and we'll do that for, I'll say a minute, because we're definitely running out of time. Okay?

Melissa Rosen:

Linda, can I just ask you a question for the timeline-

Linda Pressman:

Yes.

Melissa Rosen:

... are we supposed to just list things that we'll expand upon later? Is that what you had in mind?

Linda Pressman:

The tiny timeline, it's an exercise that can be done in two segments. So, the first thing would be recognizing what you have timelines about, right? And the second one would be filling in the timeline. But if you think of a timeline right now, just do it. Do one tiny timeline, even if it starts with the shock of the diagnosis and it ends at today. So, we know that there's some unknown future. And you can also just make a list of all the things you'd like to do a tiny timeline about. But the idea is making the work small, bringing it down to a manageable level so that it doesn't get overwhelming. Because when we start thinking we have to write an opus or we have to write our whole life story or whatever, it gets very unmanageable. So, I am going to set the timer for one minute and I'll start it. Okay?

10 more seconds. Okay. Okay. I'm sorry this is so abbreviated. But I think for me, coping creatively with cancer, to use the title of this talk, was really important to me. It was important because it allowed my story to have some importance, and it kind of allows me, as a mortal human being, to put my stake in the sand and say, "Hey, I was here. Good and bad, I was here." So, I'll provide Melissa and Symone with follow-up information about doing those writing exercises. And I welcome any questions anyone has. Thank you.

Melissa Rosen:

Thank you so much. And right now we have some questions, but if you have questions that you haven't put into the chat box yet, please do that. We do have some questions and more may be coming in as we keep talking. But let's start. So, first of all, I want to say that when Hanna defined compassion as a

difficult situation plus love, that really very much resonated with me. There was a question in the chat box. You had said something about when we acknowledge a feeling, it allows us to feel more empowered to deal with it, maybe to rid ourselves of that negative self-talk.

But somebody wanted to know, you said it's a human experience. Other people have gone through it. What if you're an outlier? What if you aren't responding? You aren't reacting, either physically to treatment or emotionally to your situation the way the vast majority of people do. How in a situation like that, can you be compassionate? Can you stop yourself from blaming yourself or feeling angry with your body or things like that?

Hanna Kreiner:

First of all, I think it's helpful to just start with the naming of those things. To just recognize that, "Oh, I'm angry with my body." I think that that is such a common experience, but it feels maybe taboo to go there, or maybe doesn't make sense to people, because it doesn't seem like... "Well, usually I'm angry at someone else. It feels strange to be angry at my body. I'm part of my body." And so, it doesn't need to make sense. Your feelings are your feelings, and that makes them make sense. They are valid. We are not logical beings, we are emotional beings. So, I think naming the struggles first, and that there are always pieces to connect with to other people, and not responding to a treatment is, unfortunately, a very common thing. The doctors like to give you all these statistics, but really all that really matters is what happens to you.

And that anyone who's been in that office and walked in and been like, "I don't want to be here," as Linda was saying, you're naming something that basically everybody has felt, and maybe they just haven't said it out loud, and the doctors and the nurses aren't saying, "Hey, you don't want to be here." They're not talking about it all the time. So, I think naming it and acknowledging it does wonders for allowing us to process. We're talking about coping creatively. The more we shed light on whatever's happening inside, it's not as scary. It's kind of like when you see a scary shadow and then you turn on the light and it's just, "Oh, it's just my crumpled-up laundry." Then you recognize and you show other people and they're like, "Yeah, I've got that same pile of laundry on my chair." Because we all have it and it's not as scary when we can talk about it.

So, finding people to talk to. I've had the honor of facilitating a lot of cancer support groups, and even those people that felt like outliers were able to connect with other people who felt like outliers in another respect or had a different kind of rare disease presentation, or were able to find a group that with the magic of the internet, finding people who did... It's very rare, and you might be across the world from them, but you can find people who are going through something like you. And as you all know, even if you have the same diagnosis, you can have very different experiences from people. So, just kind of connecting on more of a universal level, there's a lot there to connect on.

Melissa Rosen:

Amazing.

Hanna Kreiner:

And focusing on what we share tends to help boost our morale.

Melissa Rosen:

Yeah, thank you. Thank you very much. I hope that was helpful. Very practical question, Linda. Somebody says they've done the tiny timeline. What's the next step for after this webinar? What should they do with that tiny timeline?

Linda Pressman:

Yeah, good question. So, the tiny timeline is a way to make the story approachable, so hopefully as you write it, you find an entrance into the story. If I can find a door into my story, whether it's me looking at my mammography that looked like a constellation of stars, standing next to the radiologist if it's me with the nurse navigator being handed the bag. Whatever. If I can find the entry into the story, then I can start writing it. So, with the tiny timeline, you would simply know you're writing a small segment. Only write that part, ignore the rest of it, and the story will come out. Your whole DNA of the story will be in each tiny piece. Hopefully, that's helpful.

Melissa Rosen:

Yeah, absolutely. And as you guys are answering these questions, I'm loving what is going in the chat box. Somebody says that every year on their cancer anniversary, they write a piece with a theme, lessons learned, what survivorship means, things like that. And it allows them to share some humor about it too. Somebody talked about feeling like their body was a traitor, especially after living a healthy lifestyle, took a while to feel compassion, but it really was able to allow them to feel comfortable with their own body again.

Let me ask, this will sort of be for both of you. So, I happen to do some writing too. And as I can imagine, and please, I want to hear your experience too, but getting something out on paper makes my body feel lighter in terms of, "Okay, that's not weighing on me anymore. I can keep it, I know it's true, it's on paper. I don't need to forget about it because it's on paper. But also, I don't need to have it weigh on me." Is that what you feel, Linda, when you write? And then I have a similar question for you, Hanna.

Linda Pressman:

Yeah, I would say that my stories kind of put shape to my experiences, because otherwise, it's just kind of overwhelming. But let's say I was going to write about all the bad boyfriends I had. Suddenly, there they are, right? It's finite. I've got the timeline. I know how actually, when I look at it, there was a steady creeping upwards to higher quality guys or something. But it does help me to shape my story and to also claim my space.

Linda Pressman:

I don't know how many people are talking from the... I agree, but yeah. Mine would be starting in the pit somewhere and then going to my husband. But anyway, yeah, I think that talking from the place that almost nobody talks about, right? Because it's almost like I think I'm going to jinx myself if I celebrate my survivorship or something, but to actually claim my story, it's a really powerful thing, and I have a unique view. Every one of us has a unique view of what it looked like. And so, I love that part of it.

Melissa Rosen:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. That's fantastic. So, Hanna, you were able to say that there were studies that were done that being present in the moment helps people feel empowered, that they can handle what's coming their way or what's already in them at that moment. They can handle whatever. Do we understand the mechanism? And if we do, can you explain it to us in a very layman's fashion?

Hanna Kreiner:

Well, the study that comes to mind first is just, we often think that when we're going through something difficult that we should distract ourselves constantly. And I think that that is a tool for a time and a place.

If you've got a scan in two days, distract yourself, or you're waiting for something like that, distraction can be super helpful. As a way of life, though it does not bring happiness. And so, present moment awareness, there's a study that they did probably 10 years ago where they were texting people and they were like, "What are you doing right now? Are you paying attention to it? And what's your rating of stress and happiness?" And people, even if they were doing something unpleasant, like stuck in traffic, they shouldn't be texting, but if they were doing something unpleasant, but they were present to their experience, their self-reported happiness was greater.

And so, it's just interesting that although daydreaming sounds nice, being out of the moment is not what the research suggests is actually helpful to our quality of life and our happiness. The mechanisms, I can't speak to the neurobiology of it, but generally when we're in the present moment, we see things more clearly because we all have a history, we all have a bias, and so we add on so much. So, if someone cuts me off in traffic, it's going to be a different story that I tell myself than someone who's just been in a car accident or a first time driver. We all bring something, we all have a lens and we all have our experience. Mindfulness is just a practice of seeing things like, "What if I took all of those layers of the stories off and I just saw it just as it was?"

If it were a silent movie, this is what happened, and then this happened, and then we can see things more clearly. And it's not like we have to live life detached like that, but when we're stressed, we need to zoom out a bit and it helps give us perspective and then we can get more creative about, "Well, maybe I could call this, my friend suggested this place for a second opinion. I could go there. Or I'm really struggling with the finances of this, but oh, I just remember..." When you're less stressed, you can remember things more, you can think more clearly. You can recognize if you're having a struggle asking for help and move through the barriers with a little bit more awareness.

Melissa Rosen:

That's great. I love the image of a silent film. I think that's one that people will remember and can take with them to sort of say, "Okay, I need to be in the moment right now and get that." I wish we had more time, and somebody posted in the chat, each of these modalities could be several sessions in and of themselves, and that is so true. But both Hanna and Linda will share some resources that next week you will receive as part of a follow-up email with a link to the recording as well. Once again, I want to thank both Linda and Hanna for sharing their expertise and their passions. I hope you found the presentation tonight as inspiring as I did. As we conclude this evening, the evaluation link is going into the chat box right now. We ask that you just take a moment to share your thoughts on tonight's program.

You can actually click on that evaluation link and fill it out as you're listening to the last few moments of our webinar. And that's going to go in any second. And if this evening inspired you to find a creative outlet to process your experience, Sharsheret has several different opportunities to get you started. We currently have a weekly Yoga for Cancer session on Wednesday afternoons, and there's a link going in now so that you can register for that, or you can find the link to register on our website.

We're in the process of scheduling several music and movement webinars for the summer months and looking forward to some more Zentangle workshops. Zentangle is actually a form of meditative guided doodling that is awesome. And our website has even more opportunities. Check out the chat box for not only the Yoga for Cancer registration link, but also some additional wellness videos and links.

And of course, remember that talking helps to process as well. And Sharsheret's social workers are there for you to answer questions, to listen to you vent, to connect you to resources, and to provide you with support. You can reach our team through the contact information in our chat box right now, clinicalstaff@sharsheret.org. Thank you so much for being here and we look forward to seeing you again soon. Bye-bye.

