



Resilience and Choice

By Kathy Marshall Emerson, Executive Director
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Recently I flew half way across the country to visit my daughter and her family. While I was there I found myself recounting my own experience with thought choices. My choices made a huge difference in the state of mind with which I met a variety of life challenges. There is no limit to the examples. Job losses became opportunities, frustrations turned into neutral observations, death of loved ones yielded deep gratitude, aging is accompanied by appreciation, and illness met with genuine hope.

Before I encountered resilience studies I might have seen such difficulties as overwhelming, unbearably sad, or a permanent risk factor diminishing my own happiness and well-being. What stood out in the scientific evidence was that not everyone succumbed in difficult times. In fact the vast majority of people studied realized surprisingly positive outcomes. But the research did not offer practical guidance for personally navigating difficult terrain.

Thankfully my colleague Bonnie Benard had connected me to the promising practice known as Health Realization and now called the Three Principles. Two decades ago – it seems like light years – I began to learn in a very simple and straightforward way that every person has a natural resilience or innate mental health and human beings all operate in the same way mentally. The principles Roger Mills taught made sense to me and complimented resilience research. I could understand that we operate from the inside out. My thinking immediately caused feelings and resulting behavior. What was being called “Mind” I easily understood as the spiritual wisdom that I had learned of as a child. There was more to *Me* than *me* and I could trust that. What was much less clear was that I had a choice about trusting that *Knowing*.

It was truly a leap of faith to *choose* to experiment with noticing the principles in operation in my day-to-day life. As I took those first tentative steps in learning, I was able to, in one short afternoon, let go of unusually worrisome thoughts about critical home care I had just arranged for a dear relative and her family. I literally had a different experience as the thought popped up, “It is so much better today than it was it was last week!” From there I was able to experiment with choice again, letting go of the ‘what if’s’ as a job ended, facing life as a widow, and even many years later welcoming marriage. After years of choosing to let go of thoughts and welcoming the unknown I am certain the next step will always come clear.

If I could give my children a permanent legacy it would be the simple understanding that resilience and happiness rest on trusting our ability to make thought choices. This means life events, other people, our own thoughts, are not our master. We are the *chooser*. We are in charge. We have been created with the capacity to *think*, *notice* and *know*. All that is required is that we learn these simple principles and be willing to take a test drive into the unknown. The pool of choice is limitless. Choice serves us well if we are willing to realize one choice is always just waiting and letting wisdom and insight arrive.

Syd Banks was so fond to say, “Happiness is just one thought away.” In *The Missing Link*, he said, “Among the greatest gifts given to us are the power of free thought and free will, which give us the stamp of individuality, enabling us to see life as we wish....*Optimism* is a spiritual quality and a guiding light that will lead you to your happiness.” (pp.50-51)

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