

RANDOM REFLECTIONS: Necessary Stress Reduction ...

By Kathryn Wishlow

Everyone I have connected with in the last month, whether by text, phone call or drop in visits ... all are suffering from various forms of stress, worry, anxiety or depression. There is a lot going on in the “outside world” around us and it has been extremely hard to insulate ourselves from the chaos. The continuous descent southwards of that Polar Vortex has not helped, either!

Although the piles of snow we got last week may have “insulated” my gardens from the extreme cold spells we have endured lately, it did add to my personal stress levels. This is the first year in the last twenty-five spent living in Bancroft, where my maintenance help had to snowshoe around my house to avoid the over-waist deep snow just to use the roof rake. It did make me chuckle to see him standing on top of my hedges and level with my verandah floor. Good thing he could not hear me laughing when with one good pull, a huge cascade of snow suddenly came down from the corner ... he should have had his mouth closed. Sadly, I realized it had been a very long time since I had experienced a good laugh. Laughter de-stresses!

Setting a few personal boundaries has become necessary for my stress reduction. A few of my friends say they cannot watch the news anymore because of its negative

affect on their thoughts. I do need to know what is happening, but found that limiting my exposure to situations I have no control over, helped me process things better. So I only watch different news channels for about ten minutes at a time, and about four or five times a day.

I suggested doing this to a person I am close to who was watching news channels all day long and getting more and more upset. I pointed out that fear and anger produces the extra adrenaline (fight or flight syndrome) that needs an outlet or it can cause many health issues. I know that from experience. Bottling up those emotions over a long period gave me stomach ulcers twice in my life. Been there, done that, and learned my lesson ... never again!

Another person I know tends to search for comfort food to reduce her attention to things that make her anxious. Someone else I know cannot eat or even think about food when worry seems to contract her stomach and eating anything gives her painful indigestion. Noticing their processes made me speculate about where we get food issues as solutions from ... likely learned at an early age from our own family. I do remember my mother tended to get hungry when she was under pressure and reach for sweets. Meanwhile my father

could not eat, sometimes had a drink to relax, and chewed his fingernails to the quick. Good thing I am highly allergic to alcohol in any form, and stopped biting my nails in my late teens.

A few of my friends live in the country, and have the ability to do outside chores like chopping wood to reduce their frustration levels. Jogging, going for a short run, heading to the gym for a workout, or just walking around the block gets your blood flowing, fresh oxygen to the brain, and helps clear your head. Concentrating on any physical activity seems to be more healthily productive than allowing our concerns to immobilize us.

For me, every time I get really down, I focus my attention on deep breathing and “counting my blessings” like my grandmother taught me. I start with being very grateful for the smallest things. As I search my mind for more and more to be happy about ... I actually feel my spirits lift. For me, these challenging times make it necessary to practice stress reduction DAILY!

(Kathryn Wishlow belongs to White Pine Writers Inc., a local group of like-minded authors whose book “The Art of ... RePurposing Yourself!” is available locally & at Chapters/Indigo. Follow them on Facebook or www.whitepinewriters.ca)