

January/February 2025

# WOMEN *2* WOMEN

M I C H I G A N M A G A Z I N E

Empowering Voices, Inspiring Journeys, Celebrating Women!

**The Power of  
Awareness**

*Jennifer Beard*

**Your Story  
Makes You  
Strong**

*Mimi Matthews*

**Letting Go**

*Suzanne Young*



**Alkawther Gerych**

*Smarter Cleaner Leaner*

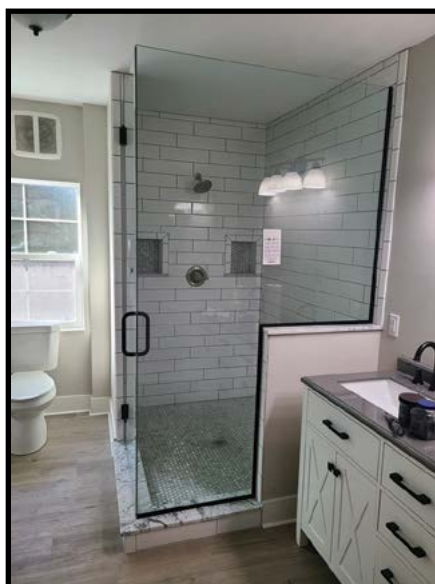
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**Our Mission:**

Women2Women Michigan was created to connect women with women for good to encourage, support, have fun, do business and provide links for women's resources.

**DO YOU KNOW A MICHIGAN WOMAN WE SHOULD FEATURE?**

Submit your stories online at [w2wmichigan.com](http://w2wmichigan.com). Article guidelines are under the magazine tab.

**WHY ADVERTISE WITH US?**

Women make the majority of purchasing decisions. They buy goods and services for their homes, gardens, businesses, entertainment, health and nutrition, the list is endless. They want to be informed and connected in their communities. Event-driven marketing makes education fun and rewarding. You can reach these women in a heartwarming environment at Women2Women Michigan events and through our magazine.

**READERSHIP & DISTRIBUTION**

Women2Women Michigan magazine is distributed to subscribers via US mail. It is also available at every Women2Women Michigan event, chamber events, and women's organizations. It is professionally delivered to various locations throughout the area including restaurants, hospitals, retail locations and medical offices in southeastern Michigan. Interested in hosting a distribution location? Email us at [office@w2wmichigan.com](mailto:office@w2wmichigan.com).

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# note from our editor

“Love yourself first  
and everything else  
falls into line.”

~ Lucille Ball



Debra K. Collins  
Publisher



Mimi Matthews  
Editor



Kellie Pardi  
Marketing/Promotions



Jennifer Gardner  
Creative Director

## theme

# Start Your Year Strong

Are you someone who is invigorated by new starts and likes to make resolutions or set goals because it's a new year? Or are you the type of person who feels sluggish and like a bear who wants to hibernate during the months of January and February and then comes alive during spring? Do you like to put a plan in place, go with the flow for a bit, or are you too exhausted by the holidays and the end 2024 to even think clearly right now?

There is no right or wrong way to start your year and Women2Women is a judgment-free zone! Whichever type you are the articles in this issue will give you a lot to think about. There are several to help you plan your year, whenever that takes place—*Top 5 Steps of Achieving Financial Wellness* by Jill Carr, *Before Making New Year's Resolutions* by Trice Berlinski, *Master Your Goals* by Debra Loader, and *Positive Thinking Is Only Step One* by Kelly Stonerock.

Also included are two real-life stories about tackling the difficulties of changing our body image—*Body Confidence* by Emily Cowen and *The Journey of Self* by Lynn Turner.

We are so saddened that one of our writers, Arlene Curns, author of the column Heartstrings, is no longer with us. We already miss her. Our tribute to this amazing woman—who was an inspiration to us all—is on page 9.

Women2Women is here to support you through empowering your voice, inspiring your journey, and celebrating you! We look forward to a fruitful year ahead and are thankful that you are a part of what's in store for us all.

Happy New 2025! Let's thrive!

Hugs and love,

Mimi

Stay informed of W2W happenings through our email newsletter. If you haven't been receiving them, visit [www.w2wmichigan.com](http://www.w2wmichigan.com) and sign up!



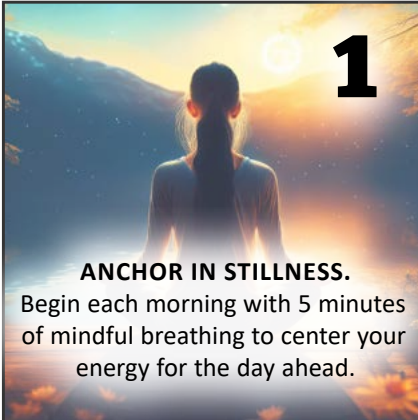
## Would you be interested in being an Ambassador for Women2Women?

We are looking for women interested in collaborating with us on a variety of different projects throughout the year. If you support what W2W stands for and like to be out in the community, this could be you! Please email our publisher, Debra, at [deb@w2wmichigan.com](mailto:deb@w2wmichigan.com) if you want to be a part of this fun and engaging team.

## contributing writers

Lynn Nicole Turner • Suzanne Young • Mimi Matthews • Tarnesa Martin • Debra Loader  
Jennifer Gardner • Jennifer Beard • Kelly Stonerock • Joy Dettling  
Kellie Pardi • Colleen Kilpatrick • Trice Berlinski • Jill Carr • Emily Cowen

# 10 Tips for a Strong Year



**1**

**ANCHOR IN STILLNESS.**  
Begin each morning with 5 minutes of mindful breathing to center your energy for the day ahead.



**2**

**CREATE WITH INTENTION.**  
Dedicate time weekly to a creative project that aligns with your personal values and passions.



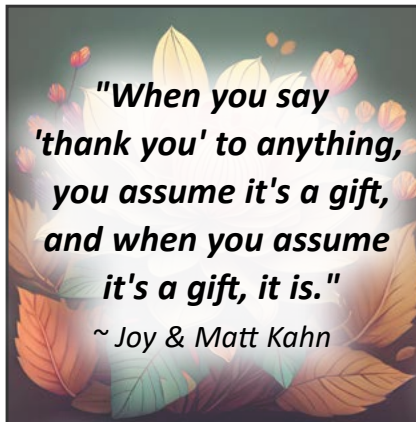
**3**

**MOVE WITH PRESENCE.**  
Incorporate slow, intentional movement (yoga, tai chi, or stretching) to stay grounded in your body.



**4**

**SET INSPIRED GOALS.**  
Choose goals that spark joy and align with your authentic self, not just societal expectations.



**"When you say 'thank you' to anything, you assume it's a gift, and when you assume it's a gift, it is."**  
~ Joy & Matt Kahn



**5**

**CURATE INSPIRATION.**  
Surround yourself with uplifting friends, books, music, or art that fuels your creativity and motivation.



**6**

**STAY ROOTED IN GRATITUDE.**  
Start a daily gratitude journal, focusing on small yet meaningful moments of joy.



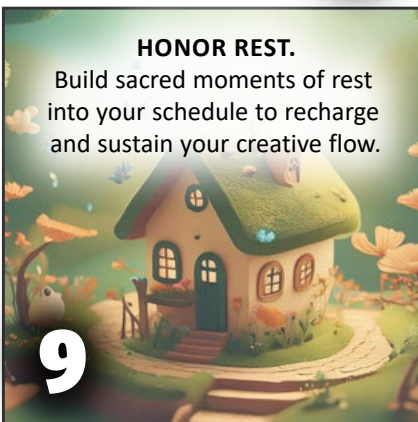
**7**

**EMBRACE PLAYFULNESS.**  
Allow yourself time to explore and experiment *without judgment*, cultivating curiosity and fun.



**8**

**VISUALIZE YOUR YEAR.**  
Create a vision board or mental picture of your ideal year to guide your focus and energy.



**9**

**HONOR REST.**  
Build sacred moments of rest into your schedule to recharge and sustain your creative flow.



**10**

**RECONNECT WITH NATURE.**  
Spend time outdoors regularly to draw inspiration from the cycles and stillness of the natural world.



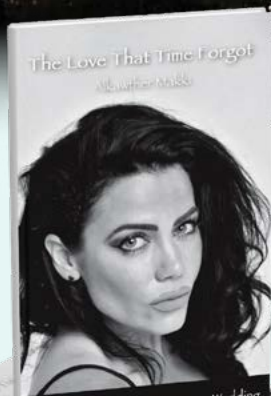
Jennifer Gardner is a wife and mother of two girls. She loves being creative with the ladies of Women2Women Michigan Magazine.



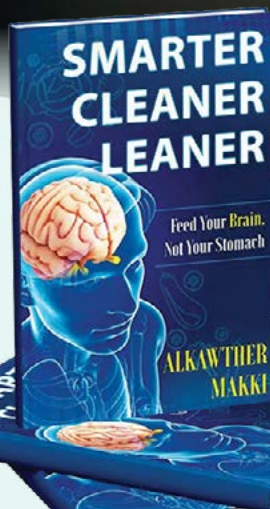
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Be a GIFTER  
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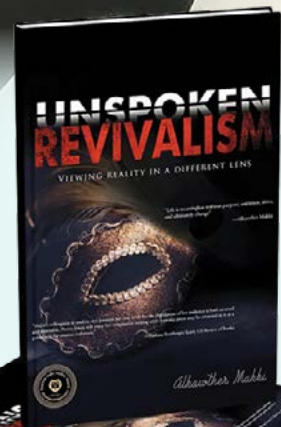
Romance Companionate Love Wedding



SMARTER  
CLEANER  
LEANER

Feed Your Brain.  
Not Your Stomach

ALKAWTHER  
MAKKI



UNSPOKEN  
REVIVALISM

VIEWING REALITY IN A DIFFERENT LENS

Alkawther Makki

**A**lkawther Gerych was born in Detroit on November 25, 1987 to parents who emigrated from Lebanon during a time of great turmoil in the region, as the country struggled through a fifteen year civil war between 1975-1990.

Her father was a professor at U of M and her mother was a traditional Muslim house wife looking after their seven children. While she had a good childhood, as the middle child she always felt that she was the mediator, always looking out for everyone. She was a quiet, inquisitive child, always wanting to understand how the world worked, fascinated by texture and color and all things unseen but felt. But her early childhood in traditional education wasn't easy for her and she struggled to learn to read and write.

"I have a very vivid memory of my dad having a meeting with my teacher one day. I could hear them talking about how far behind I was in school because of my difficulty with reading and writing," remembers Alkawther, "The teacher was recommending that I repeat the first grade and although I didn't say anything, inside I was screaming that I didn't want to be left behind."

In these formative years she felt very isolated, not just because of feelings of inadequacy and being left behind, but because she was often physically isolated from the rest of the class when she would have to go to a separate room to be tutored. Also, many people found it hard to pronounce Alkawther's name—a Muslim name meaning abundance—and she was teased throughout her school years, which led her to dislike her name.

Eventually she caught up to the other students but the experience had already left its mark and now she had something to prove. Having four brothers she had always been a bit of a tom boy, climbing trees and rough housing and had a competitive spirit so she channeled her energy into sports. She became one of the top athletes at her school as a Track and Field and Cross Country MVP and Cross Country League Champion.

Higher education wasn't a straightforward path for her either. She enrolled in the Michigan Institute of Aviation Technologies, but as a Muslim woman wearing a burqa in a male dominated school, she was eventually forced out despite her exemplary grades. It was an incredibly difficult time in her life and eventually she decided it was not worth it to continue.

Inspired by her struggles with reading and writing as a child, she wrote her first book in 2012 titled *Unspoken Revivalism* at twenty-five years old. It was a testament to herself at a time when she needed to remember who she was and where she came from. By this time, the scars of her youth had begun to transform and writing was now an escape where she created a utopia for herself to take refuge in. She was determined to create something that was her own work from the cover to the illustrations to the writing. At this formative point in her life her hard work culminated in a three-part book, which is a compilation of poetry and proverbs, including a teaching guide for aspiring poets.

She released her second book, *Smarter Cleaner Leaner* in 2020 after a battle with her health. She had three young children, a failing marriage; she had let herself go and was overweight with high cholesterol, and had a large Symptomatic Pineal Gland cyst. She was suffering from manic episodes and blacking out. During a manic episode that scared her, she knew something needed to change. She couldn't control her emotions and thoughts anymore. Deep down she knew who she was and she no longer recognized herself.

It was time to take her life and her health into her own hands so she began researching and experimenting with food and herbs. It was during this time when Alkawther holistically healed herself physically and became her best self mentally that she realized who she is and how much she really loves her name. Today she lives by its meaning, and by the acronym she created for her name—**Aspire Lead Know Achieve Work Transform Heal Empower Reform**. She remarried in 2023 and shortly after had her fourth child, a girl!

Fast forward to today and she is a proud entrepreneur. She created Alkawther Motivation LLC where she helps others learn that their greatest weakness can ultimately become their greatest strength. She also has a line of fabulous limited-edition shoes which she designed, and a portion of the proceeds are donated to help make a difference in the lives of men, women and children battling cancer.

But the thing she is most proud of is her non-profit, UEmpower which launched on January 31st 2024, which she dubs a *cause for all causes*. Over the last year, they have created a series of events: Knock out Skin Cancer, Knock out Ovarian Cancer, Knock out Breast Cancer, Knock out Crime. In 2025 the organization will be dedicated to raising money for children, especially those economically disadvantaged and with special needs. Alkawther's Literacy Enrichment Program is vital to the organization since she struggled to read and write as a child and then became an author. She has a passion to empower children facing literacy challenges.

In addition, the Power of Sports program will complement reading, writing and arithmetic, and help children facing life's travails. Alkawther says she knows how essential it is for youth like her to have access to special education, literacy enrichment, and extracurricular activities like art, music and sports which are valuable programs vital to the developmental growth and success of children. "We want our children to become leaders."

Alkawther is always seeking to collaborate with other organizations who want to join her philanthropic mission. You can reach UEmpower at 815-367-6937 (U-15-EMPOWER) or emailing [alkawthergerych@gmail.com](mailto:alkawthergerych@gmail.com) and you can donate or purchase shoes by visiting [www.uempower.org](http://www.uempower.org)

Alkawther says she is never going to stop writing, because it's part of who she is. Her latest book, a children's book called *We Are the Leaders*, is set to be released in March of this year during National Reading Month.

A free community book fair will be held Saturday, March 1, 2025 at Gerych's Greenhouse, Flowers, and Events in Fenton featuring the release of her new book, with Alkawther available for book signing. With every book purchased one will be donated to a child in need. Award-winning Educational Entertainer, "Copper Tom" will add to the excitement, with fun activities, puppets, dance, and a sing-along. It's a great family fun fundraising event to empower our youth.

Alkawther's books are available at [www.alkawthermotivation.com](http://www.alkawthermotivation.com).



# Positive Thinking is Only Step One

If you Google the phrase, “Positive thinking,” you will get this definition, “Positive thinking is a mental and emotional attitude that involves approaching life’s challenges with a positive outlook and expecting positive results. It can have a significant impact on your mental and physical health.”

Listen, I wholeheartedly support positive thinking. There are truly no benefits to the alternative of negative thinking. However, just saying to someone you need to think positively, or even the act of applying positive thinking, is limited in its effect on your life. It can also seem like you are demeaning someone’s intelligence and not validating their feelings to just say, “think positive.” While positive thinking is the first step when facing life’s challenges, it may also be the hardest step. We tend to want to choose to wallow in our misery and pain. We hold on like we can prevent it from happening. But everything has a season, and seasons must end to make room for the next season. Choosing to think positively is your first step to getting out of a challenge.

Positive thinking can include looking for the good in any situation, expecting the best, making the best of a bad situation or believing the best in a person. It can be used in self-talk to help you replace negative verbiage. Philippians 4:8 tells us to “Think on things that are good, pure and right.” What you think about has a lot to do with your outcome in any situation. Positive thinking is good, it just needs to be understood as step one in a process. It is a choice and an action. If you want out of this season of your life and into a new season, you are going to have to choose to **think positively**.

I recently consoled my 19-year-old daughter. She just went through a breakup, after dating her first love for a year. While a teenage breakup is very different from other life challenges like a divorce, the death of a loved one, financial hardship, work loss or a myriad of other life challenges, the process to get to the next season of life is quite similar. Like any life challenge, she is heartbroken, sad, and unsure of her future. I do believe that God works all things for the good of those who diligently seek Him. You CAN have peace during a storm. After step one of thinking positively, we must transition to Step Two: **Believing**.

Believing is yet another choice and an action word. You may think it will all work out for the good, but do you believe it? As a pastor’s wife for 17 years, I can tell you story after story of people who thought they were believing and putting their faith and trust in God being in control, only to discover that they were still holding the reigns of control. True believing in the positive involves letting go. I have heard it said, “Let go and let God.” There is truth and wisdom in this statement. We must hand those reigns of

control over to someone else for them to be in control. I can tell you an equal number of stories of those that truly did let go and that is when there was a breakthrough in the area that needed change. I am not saying that this is an easy task. It is much easier to write and say than it is to do. But you can do it. You can think positively *and* believe that it will all work out for the good. Sometimes, the result that we are hoping for is not in our best interests. We often can only see the logic in the process by looking back in retrospect. God sees the beginning, the middle and the end. We often only see the turmoil in the present. Step two of believing can sometimes coincide or overlap with Step Three: **Create a plan**.

Creating a plan may entail new goals, new hobbies, or distractions to help you maintain a hands-off approach. Often the only way through a life challenge is to go through it. You may discover new skills or latent talents that you never knew you had. You will find strength, growth and maturity that will prepare you for the next season of your life. Surround yourself with supportive people and those that encourage and challenge you. Do *not* surround yourself with those that merely offer sympathy. You are in the healing stage of your life. You are rebuilding. You are moving forward. Hope is on the horizon. Eventually, you will reach Step Four: **Restoration**.

In the restoration stage you have now restored something that may have been broken—you! You can reflect on what you have learned. You can help others in a way that you could not have before you went through this life challenge. You can give thanks in all things. You can thank those that helped you through the first 3 stages. You can offer praise and gratitude. You have made it! You can pat yourself on the back. You can be proud. You have discovered that you are a strong, resilient woman that is worthy of the best in life. You have endured hardship like a good soldier because you ARE a soldier. You survived and you can now help others survive. You chose positive thoughts, you chose to believe, you created goals, and you are restored to a new and better you. You faced life challenges; you conquered and came out stronger on the other side. Well done good and faithful servant.



*Kelly Stonerock was raised in Clarkston. She has been a resident of Goodrich for 29 years. She is presently the CEO of BatsAndTraps.com, an animal removal company that services Genesee County and it's surrounding communities. Kelly has five children of her own and she raised three other children. She was featured on ABC's television show, "Wife*

*Swap" in 2005. Her episode is available on Hulu, Season 2: Episode 11.*



# Her “Heartstrings” Connected to Many Remembering Arlene Curns



**A**rlene Curns was an amazing woman who wrote for our magazine. For the last year and a half her stories were found under the column called “Heartstrings”. She meant to use this word to describe all the things she wrote about—experiences, stories, and people dear to her heart. But as I got to know her better, I realized that Arlene also lived and led with her whole heart.

Her Facebook page was filled with people who thanked her, appreciated her, wanted to get together with her, and expressed love for her. That’s because she poured out love on the people who knew her. People all over the world! She had a very close relationship with a young woman in Uganda who called her grandma. Arlene told the story of this young woman in our Fall 2023 “Friendship” Issue. I’m including an excerpt from this article, the words of her dear friend in Uganda, because I believe they show Arlene’s true, consistent character.

***“You were there when my mental health was tested and the days when I thought I was better off dead than alive. You were there to remind me of all the beautiful things around me. You never failed to remind me how much God loved me. Every text you sent me, you always told me that you loved me. You always concluded your messages with “I love you, My Sweet Girl,” or “I love you forever.” You were the only human being who constantly told me that I was loved. Your words have always been direct to my spirit because when you say them, I know them as truth.”***

I believe this is how she was with everyone. Arlene deeply loved her precious family, both past and present. She is the matriarch of a family of forty-four which spans five generations. I believe they valued her wisdom, wit, encouragement, and love of Jesus.

Arlene began writing for us in the spring of 2023, and we looked forward to the day we could meet in person. Unfortunately she passed away in November of this year. She was ninety-seven years old and still as sharp as ever! Her last article for us was in our Fall 2024 issue on “Finding Your Voice”. She expressed that at age 92 she really had found her voice—through writing!

***“My greatest pleasure is expressing myself with my pen. When I was 92 years old, I wrote my memoir. I sent my manuscript to a Christian publisher. They had three judges read it and they voted to print. My second book was written when I was 95. Both have been well-received. I have found my voice! It’s speaking through the written word. I’m ready to rest on my laurels.”***

Well, sweet Arlene, none of us knew that the last words you wrote for us would come true in this way! You have been such an inspiration to us and you will be terribly missed by the Women2Women community. We are grateful for the pleasure of knowing you.

Arlene’s books may be purchased on Amazon under the search name “Arlene Curns”. Her books are titled “Homemade Noodles and Cars” and “If This Porch Could Talk”.

To read Arlene’s articles, go to [www.w2wmichigan.com/magazine/issues/](http://www.w2wmichigan.com/magazine/issues/)

*Arlene Curns was an author, encourager, and matriarch of a family of 44, spanning five generations. She enjoyed life in northern Michigan surrounded by family and friends. We will forever be grateful for her gift of sharing.*

healthy eating, healthy lifestyle, healthy mindset

# Master Your Goals

## THE SECRET TO SUCCESS IN 2025

5 Keys for Inevitable Success



As we step into 2025, many women are thinking about how to make this year different—how to finally achieve those long-held dreams, improve their lives, and embrace what matters most. Whether you're focusing on health, career, relationships, or financial goals, this time of year brings a sense of possibility.

But let's be honest: how often do those big goals start to fade by February? If you've ever felt frustrated or defeated when your goals didn't work out, know this—it's not you. Most of us are simply taught the wrong way to approach goal setting. The good news? A simple mindset shift can turn frustration into fulfillment.

### WHY GOALS FALL SHORT (AND HOW TO FIX IT)

One of the biggest mistakes we make is setting goals we can't control. For example, let's say you want to lose 20 pounds or save \$20,000 by the end of the year. These are inspiring goals, but they're actually *targets*, not actionable goals.

- A **Target** is a result you want: a number on the scale, a promotion, or a certain amount of savings.
- A **Goal** is an actionable step you take to move toward your target: drinking 60 ounces of water daily, creating a budget, or reaching out to a mentor.

The key difference? You can influence a target, but you don't have complete control over it. However, you *do* have control over the actions you take every day. When I learned this, it was a "mic drop" for me! I had been judging myself for years for either not setting goals, or never achieving the ones I did set! It was a total mindset shift!

When you shift your focus from the outcome to the process, everything changes. You stop measuring yourself by results you can't fully control and start celebrating the progress you're making through intentional action. This mindset creates clarity, confidence, and a sense of accomplishment that keeps you moving forward.

### THE FIVE KEYS FOR INEVITABLE SUCCESS IN 2025

Here are five keys to help you approach your goals with purpose and compassion this year:

#### 1 KNOW WHAT'S IMPORTANT ABOUT YOUR TARGET

Before diving into the action steps, take a moment to reflect on what's important about your target. What will achieving it mean to you?

- Maybe losing weight will help you feel confident and energized for an upcoming event.
- Saving money might bring you peace of mind and the freedom to pursue something meaningful.

When you connect your target to what truly matters in your life, it becomes personal and powerful.

## 2 BREAK IT DOWN INTO ACTIONABLE GOALS

Once you have clarity about your target, list 3–5 specific actions you can take to move toward it. These should be things you can track and control.

For example:

- **Health Target: Lose 20 pounds.**  
- Goals: Drink 60 ounces of water daily, meal plan every Sunday, walk one mile three times a week.
- **Financial Target: Save \$20,000.**  
- Goals: Create a budget, track expenses, wait 24 hours before making purchases over \$100.

## 3 TRACK YOUR PROGRESS WITHOUT JUDGMENT

Use a habit tracker to monitor your goals weekly. This isn't about perfection or judgment—it's about curiosity. Celebrate the wins, no

matter how small, and look for patterns if something isn't working. This gentle reflection helps you stay consistent without feeling overwhelmed.

## 4 ANTICIPATE OBSTACLES & PLAN AROUND THEM

What might get in your way?

- Is time a challenge?  
Schedule your action steps into your calendar.
- Are you unsure about how to start? Find a friend, mentor, or community for support.

By identifying potential roadblocks early, you can create solutions before they stop your progress.

## 5 REFLECT & REVISE REGULARLY

As you go through the year, set aside time to reflect on your progress. What's working well? What could you adjust to make your actions easier or more enjoyable? Maybe it's trying new recipes, finding a walking buddy, or switching up your budget categories.

Remember, this process is flexible. It's not about doing things perfectly—it's about making meaningful progress toward what matters most to you.

## EMBRACING YOUR BEST YEAR YET

As 2025 unfolds, take a moment to reflect on this: You are not defined by the targets you reach or don't reach. What truly matters is the care and intention you bring to the process. When you focus on the actions you can control, you create a ripple effect of success in all areas of your life.

This year, let go of the pressure to be perfect and embrace curiosity, self-compassion, and intentional progress. By focusing on these five keys, you'll find that success isn't just possible—it's inevitable.

You've got this.



Debra Loader is a Christian Health and Wellness Coach, a Christian Life Coach, as well as a National Board Certified Health and Wellness Coach (NBC-HWC). She helps women integrate their Christian faith into their health and wellness journey to find greater motivation and resilience. You can contact Debra at [debra@debraloaderslivingwell.com](mailto:debra@debraloaderslivingwell.com) or 810-287-4096.

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# Top 5 Tips for Achieving Financial Wellness

**Financial Wellness is not just a cool buzzword. Improving your financial health may have a positive effect on your mental health and stress level<sup>1</sup>. Here are some top tips to help you.**

## 1. TRACK, TRACK, TRACK

You can't improve what you don't measure. Just like if you are trying to lose weight, it's important to keep track of the numbers. If you aren't already, start tracking your income and your expenses to see where you are. There are a variety of apps out there now that can help you do this from the convenience of your smartphone.

## 2. PAY DOWN DEBT

This is always a good goal to start with but make it SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-Bound). A generic goal like, "I want to have my debt paid off" is not very motivating or specific, and therefore unlikely to be achieved. Try this instead – figure out how much extra money per month you can put towards your debts, and then set up a schedule for payment.

You may have heard of the "debt snowball" method. It is just as it sounds: you start paying down your debts by putting a little bit towards each debt. Once you have the smallest debt paid off, you take the amount you were paying to that debt and put it towards the next smallest loan. And so forth, until you are rolling a big snowball down the hill full of all the minimum payments you were making on smaller amounts of debt.

## 3. START (OR BUILD UP) AN EMERGENCY FUND

A study done by Empower<sup>2</sup> in 2024 stated that at least 37% of Americans would struggle to pay for a \$400 emergency. To prepare for an emergency, I recommend creating an emergency savings account, where the goal would be to save 3 - 6 months of your expenses. It will provide a cushion for extenuating circumstances, such as losing a job or having a medical emergency.

## 4. SAVE FOR RETIREMENT

Even if you are currently saving, consider increasing your contribution. You can now contribute<sup>3</sup> \$23,500 to a 401(k), 403(b), and most 457 plans. If you are going to be age 50 by the end of 2025, you can contribute another \$7,500 in "catch-up" contributions and if you are going to be 60-63, there is an even further catchup amount. If you don't have a retirement plan or are already "maxing it out" and want to do more, you can now contribute up to \$7,000 in an IRA or Roth IRA or \$8,000 if you are over age 50.

## 5. CONSIDER HIRING A PROFESSIONAL TO HELP

Professionals can help you save time and money. For example, hiring a CPA to do your taxes might uncover extra deductions. Think about hiring a financial advisor to help you think through and achieve your future financial goals and avoid potential blind spots along the way. A study by The Vanguard Group<sup>4</sup> indicates that professional advisors can add about 3% return to a client's portfolio. Professional advisors can provide sound advice during periods of transition and major life events that we often navigate, such as divorce, inheriting money, and planning for retirement, and

also provide accountability to help you work toward your goals.

Remember, a goal without a plan, is just a wish.



*Jill is a passionate Senior Wealth Advisor, continually striving to find new ways to exceed her clients' expectations with her depth of knowledge in taxes, estate planning, and personal finance. She seeks to empower her clients to increase their own financial literacy and understanding of wealth management. She's especially interested in helping younger clients and older single women who may need help with their finances.*

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1 <https://www.tiaa.org/public/learn/financial-wellness-and-mental-health#:~:text=There's%20a%20strong%20connection%20between,to%20more%20mental%20health%20struggles>.

2 <https://www.empower.com/press-center/37-americans-cant-afford-emergency-expense-over-400-according-empower-research#:~:text=to%20Empower%20research-37%25%20of%20Americans%20can't%20afford%20an%20emergency%20expense%20over,%24400%2C%20according%20to%20Empower%20research&text=Greenwood%20Village%2C%20COLO%20%E2%80%93%20July%202022,according%20to%20new%20Empower%20research>

3 <https://www.irs.gov/newsroom/401k-limit-increases-to-23500-for-2025-ira-limit-remains-7000#:~:text=Highlights%20of%20changes%20for%202025,to%20an%20IRA%20remains%20%247%2C000>

4 <https://advisors.vanguard.com/insights/article/putting-a-value-on-your-value-quantifying-advisors-alpha>

# The Power of Awareness

Imagine going through life with a blindfold on—you're missing out on subtle cues, ignoring your body's needs, and overlooking details in your environment. Now, think about the impact of removing that blindfold. Suddenly, every part of your life starts to shift. This is exactly what awareness can do. It's about more than just seeing; it's about deeply connecting with our thoughts, emotions, and environment to drive meaningful changes.

Consider Phil Connors from the movie *Groundhog Day*, portrayed by Bill Murray. Phil is a weatherman stuck reliving the same day over and over. Initially, he's oblivious to how his sour mood affects others. Yet, as the repetitive days force him to face the consequences of his actions, Phil begins to see the need for change. This shift in awareness doesn't just alter his actions—it transforms his entire outlook, leading to a profound personal transformation. It's a clear, albeit dramatic, example of how awareness can fundamentally change our lives.

Many of us live on autopilot, much like Phil. We drift along, passively accepting whatever life throws our way. This can be draining, and to cope, we often seek escape in activities like nights out or binge-watching series, where we invest more in fictional lives than in our own.

However, there are those who take the reins, intentionally choosing their careers and pastimes. Yet even these proactive individuals can find themselves merely going through the motions.

## HOW OUR BRAIN MANAGES ENERGY

Our brains have a built-in mechanism for energy conservation. They occasionally switch to a "low power" mode, especially when we're safe and the tasks at hand are routine. This was vital when physical dangers were a regular part of human life. Today, it allows us the luxury of mentally checking out now and then.

During these downtime periods, the brain's Default Mode Network (DMN) activates. It helps us process past experiences and plan future actions. It's essentially our brain's method of reflecting and strategizing with minimal external distraction. Meanwhile, our prefrontal cortex manages our focus and attention during more demanding tasks, balancing our need to conserve energy with our need to perform.

Research has shown that even modest increases in awareness can lead to significant benefits. For example, hotel housekeepers who

viewed their work as physical exercise experienced improved health, including weight loss. Mindfulness training has been shown to improve focus and memory, enhancing both academic and professional performance. Simple changes, like mindful eating practices, can lead to healthier eating habits without much effort.

## MAKING AWARENESS WORK FOR YOU

Awareness is an active process of engagement with the world. It begins by recognizing our roles in our own lives and extends to how we interact with those around us. By developing awareness, we don't just enhance our own lives—we can positively influence our community.

Try starting each day with a mindfulness exercise, such as a brief meditation or a moment of gratitude, to set a tone of presence and intention. Engage fully with your surroundings and the people you encounter. Small, consistent acts of awareness can transform routine experiences into opportunities for growth and connection. So, are you ready to remove the blindfold and explore the possibilities that await you with a new sense of awareness?



*Jennifer Beard, owner of Bold Life & Bold Life Academy, guides individuals through transformative shifts in behavior, beliefs, and emotions, unlocking the path to their most extraordinary lives. Visit Jennifer at [JenniferBeard.com](http://JenniferBeard.com).*



BEFORE MAKING NEW  
YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS,

# Fall In Love



**You know** you want to make some changes in your life. You figure now that the new year is upon us, it is a good time to start. You've tried this before, though, and "failed" so there is a little seed of doubt sewn deep within your psyche. Yet this time you tell yourself it will be different because you are committed!

What if your approach is different this year? Instead of hoping life won't hinder your commitment and dedication, what if you take a scientific, analytical perspective to plot an approach for the best chances of success?

Understanding how your brain develops and how you can rewire it to make effective changes will increase your chances of losing weight, quitting smoking, eating healthier... fill in the \_\_\_\_\_ blank.

Here are the steps:

## 1. ASSESS, WHAT FAVORABLE HABITS YOU ALREADY HAVE:

- Do you floss and brush your teeth regularly?
- Do you get enough sleep?
- Is your diet mostly healthy?
- Are you able to manage your finances?
- Do you take adequate quality time for your relationships, including the one with yourself?
- Do you nurture your mental health?
- Etc.

Be as creative as you like listing these habits.

## 2. NEXT, ASK YOURSELF:

For the ones in which you are successful, is it because you were taught from a very young age to be that way? Or is it because you have the self-discipline to control yourself?

Self-discipline, in and of itself, can be a habit formed in childhood. But if that isn't true for you, then maybe you faced some serious life challenges that provoked you to change. A health scare, or bankruptcy, can be painful enough to lead to some life-changing patterns. There is another way, however. As I learned in my training with Dr. Joe Dispenza, "You can learn and change in a state of pain and suffering, or you can learn and change in a state of joy and inspiration. The choice is yours". New Year's resolutions typically are based on joy and inspiration. So, why aren't they successful more often?

I have two theories:

- You don't have the self-discipline, which is fueled by self-love
- You are basing the resolution on thought/intention alone

Almost everyone, at some point in time or another, has struggled to love themselves. When you feel worthy to have a good life, you dedicate yourself to healthier practices. Self-discipline evolves out of self-love. Developing self-love is the most essential step in this process. It is the foundation on which all potential future good habits can be formed. You might be asking how to get to that point of self-love.

## 3. LEARN & PRACTICE MINDFULNESS MEDITATION.

Other meditation practices have their value, however, Mindfulness Meditation is defined as present-moment awareness without judgment. Repeatedly letting go of self-judgment as you sit in meditation allows you to grow in self-compassion and self-love. As the saying goes, you don't know what you don't know, and that which arises out of stillness brings an awareness of subconscious patterns that are worthy of your attention. In most cases, these patterns

are associated with programming that occurred from the time you were born until about seven years of age. During this time of your life, you were primarily in a theta brainwave state and therefore very easily influenced by the people and circumstances around you. This awareness is like shining a flashlight in the dark corners of a room and seeing cobwebs you didn't notice during the daylight hours. Once you see the cobwebs you can clear them out. I have had experiences where the cobwebs dissipate immediately when I become aware of them. Other times, when the cobweb is a habit I want to overcome, it has been necessary to make the habit the focus of my meditation and mindfulness practice, repeatedly bringing conscious awareness to it, to overcome it.

#### 4. REPROGRAM YOUR BRAIN.

Just as you were programmed as a young child, you can program yourself now, but this time with the beliefs, habits, thoughts, feelings, and even outcomes, you want. In the practice of meditation, you move out of beta brain waves into alpha and theta. This process typically takes 7-10 minutes. During this time, with the use of imagination and conjuring up feelings in the body of having achieved your goals, you are initiating a process where the neural connections for what you desire move closer. The more you believe, think, act, and feel your desires are true, the more you bring those neural connections together. The challenge is overcoming cues from our bodies, the environment, and time. For example, if your goal is to watch less TV but when you are in your home someone you live with almost always has the TV on, your environment is reminding you of who you are, while you are trying to become someone new. In addition, any fears you might have of not being able to change, or focusing on how and when the change will happen, send the message to the

subconscious that the change hasn't happened, thus impacting your hormonal state which affects the outcome.

Falling in love with myself has been a process. I cannot tell you how many times I thought I was done. Now I know better. Over the years some of the changes I have achieved through the process above include:

- Overcoming anxiety and depression
- Ease in my body: no more TMJ, uplifted shoulders, or tension
- No longer biting cuticles
- Increased curiosity and playfulness
- Stopped losing my temper with my daughters (my favorite one)
- Started unapologetically putting my own needs first without the fear of losing other's love (this has been the hardest and longest journey)

None of these have been New Year's Resolutions. Some things cannot be scheduled. Happy New Year!

Mindfully Yours,  
Trice



*As a leader in the mindfulness movement Trice began teaching mindfulness 2011. She started a non-profit in 2012, The Michigan Collaborative for Mindfulness in Education, and has taught kids, teachers, & administrators from Detroit to the UP! As a Certified Meditation Instructor, also certified in the neuroscience of change by Dr. Joe Dispenza, she has trained numerous individuals & organizations, including GM, U of M, and more.*



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# THE MAGIC EQUATION for a Joyful Life

"WHAT IF A SIMPLE  
SUBTRACTION COULD  
LIBERATE YOUR ENERGY?"

WHAT IF A SIMPLE ADDITION  
COULD IGNITE YOUR  
PASSION?"

Let me show you how.

## SUBTRACTION

A few months ago, I began interviewing readers of my book, 'Eliminate What You Tolerate' in preparation for an online course I'm creating about eliminating tolerations. A toleration is any thing, person or situation that persistently drains you of time, energy and focus. By conducting these interviews, I was eager to learn what my readers were experiencing as they let go of belongings, activities, jobs, commitments, tasks, relationships and habits that no longer served them. As is often the case, the first benefit readers experienced as they eliminated things they'd been putting-up with was increased energy.

Listening to my readers' stories brought the power of this technique into greater focus.

"One interviewee named Aneta said, "I quickly realized how much of my energy I was giving to things I didn't like - things that were filling my days and weeks and keeping me from what I truly love."

Another interviewee named Sylvie said, "As I learned to recognize and let go of things that were frustrating or annoying me, I instantly felt liberated, free, energized."

Their comments made me realize, once again, just how much of our energy is frittered away on thoughts of things that don't contribute to our joy - and how important it is to do something about it.

Wise ones throughout history understood the connection between thoughts and energy and explained it

like this: "**Where focus goes, energy flows.**"

In other words, if your focus is on the clutter in your environment or the unpaid bills you're avoiding, that's where a good amount of your energy is going. If your focus is on unresolved issues in a relationship or work you no longer enjoy, that's where your energy is going.

The American Philosopher William James also recognized this connection: "**Nothing is as fatiguing as the continued hanging on of an incomplete task.**"

The good news is that the reverse is also true: the moment you resolve something you've been putting-up with, the energy that was being consumed by it is quickly - oftentimes, instantly - liberated for bigger and better things. If you've ever procrastinated on doing your taxes, as I have, you know how energized you feel when you finally get them done!

**So how can you achieve the huge benefit of more energy my students, clients and readers enjoy? By applying the first half of the equation: subtracting what drains you. It's a simple as these three steps:**

1. Become aware of what you're tolerating
2. Keep a written list of your tolerations
3. Eliminate them

A more straightforward and effective personal development tool, I have not found. Just three steps: Identify, capture, take the action. Make the appointment, hire the helper, have the conversation, do the thing. And then watch what happens. If you're like most, you'll experience an immediate uptick in energy. Keep at it and you'll experience less anxiety, overwhelm and stress, too.

As you create more spaciousness in your environment, calendar and head through the elimination of tolerations, keep this important adage in mind:

**"Nature abhors a vacuum."**

When the ancient Greek Philosopher, Aristotle, made this observation back in the 4th Century B.C., I'm pretty sure he wasn't thinking about tolerations, but he certainly could have been.

The website [www.freeditonary.com](http://www.freeditonary.com) provides a modern spin on that ancient axiom which goes like this:

**"Any absence of a regular or expected person or thing will soon be filled by someone or something similar."**

This is where the second half of the magical mathematical equation comes in.

## ADDITION

The good thing is that when we eliminate even the smallest of frustrations from our lives, we create space for other things. Ideally, better things, but that's not always the case. Sometimes what comes back into our lives is more of the same.

There is a solution. It requires you to become very selective about what you allow back into the empty spaces you've just created. Like a museum curator who decides which treasures to keep, which to pass on and which new artifacts to allow in, you become the curator of your

own life. You get to decide what stays, what goes, and what you allow in.

The job of curating your own life promises to be much easier if you get crystal clear about what gives you energy. This is essential, for in the absence of clarity, you may be inclined to fill the gaps with things, relationships, opportunities and commitments that are no longer right for you causing new tolerations to form.

**Here's a simple way to gain the awareness and clarity you need to curate the next, best chapter of your life.**

Years ago, I attended a workshop led by my friend, Suzanne Young, a Law of Attraction Coach. In one of the sessions she asked us to make a list of the things, activities and events we love. This exercise, although straightforward, was not so easy to do at first, but with a bit of coaxing and some good emotive music, each of us remembered the activities that lit us up. Here's a sampling:

- Spending time in nature
- Morning walks
- Enjoying time with children and grandchildren
- Attending a sporting or theatrical event with friends
- Canoeing, kayaking, boating
- Taking photographs
- Creating art
- Riding a bike
- Taking a road trip
- Dancing
- Gathering around a fire with friends
- Attending a class
- Making music
- Hosting or attending a game night
- Enjoying a scented bath by candlelight

To every woman in attendance, this exercise was an eye-opener. The simple act of focusing on and writing down our favorite things, brought long-forgotten interests to mind and smiles to our faces. But, more importantly, the exercise helped us realize how little time and attention we had been giving to those special things that add goodness to life and joy to our hearts. With our new awareness, we were encouraged to prioritize our lives differently making room for all that we love.

I venture to say that the one of the fastest, most streamlined ways to improve your life is through this simple, mathematical equation.

*Subtract from your life that which drains your energy*

*Add to your life that which gives you energy*

### THE FIRST HALF OF THE EQUATION:

subtracting what drains you - can be mastered by becoming keenly aware of what you're putting-up with or tolerating in life, maintaining a list of those things and taking decisive action to eliminate them.

### THE SECOND HALF OF THE EQUATION:

adding that which gives you energy - can be mastered by becoming aware of what energizes you, maintaining a list of those soul-nourishing things and taking decisive action to make them part of your life.

As we are all keenly aware, personal energy is essential to a well-lived life. With it, we can do so much. Without it, we lack the get-up-and-go to bring our best self or our best ideas to the world. Begin today by applying this simple equation to uplevel every area of your life. Start small, go big and allow your inner light to shine bright! Watch as your newfound energy illuminates paths to genuine fulfillment and joy.



*Colleen Kilpatrick is the Author of "Eliminate What You Tolerate", a concise, but mighty book that has earned a 5-star rating on Amazon for helping readers identify and release*

*what no longer serves them and make room for what lights them up. A Wellbeing Mentor, Colleen helps women discover the transformative powers of ancient and modern wisdom and self-care practices to revitalize body, mind, and spirit naturally. You can contact Colleen at [colleen@colleenkilpatrick@icloud.com](mailto:colleen@colleenkilpatrick@icloud.com) or 248-762-9828.*

ACTIVATING THE  
*Power of Your  
Resilience*

Galatians 6:9 reminds us: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

In this article, we will learn how the power of resilience and resistance work together for the good of our future. In every aspect of life, relationships, work, and personal growth, the power of resilience and resistance will be given the opportunity to work for your good, so that you can prevail in your purpose with confidence.

### WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Resilience is the ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from challenges, adversities, or hardships. It reflects strength, perseverance, and the capacity to bounce back after setbacks, whether they are emotional, physical, or mental in nature. Resilience is like a muscle that strengthens with practice.

### KEY POINTS TO BUILDING UP YOUR RESILIENCE:

- Emotional Regulation – Managing feelings during tough times
- Adaptability – Flexibly responding to change or new circumstances.
- Optimism – Maintaining hope and focusing on possibilities, even in difficulty.
- Support System – relying on relationships for encouragement and guidance.
- Problem Solving – approaching challenges logically and creatively.
- Self-Awareness – Understanding one’s strengths and weaknesses in order to grow.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO ACTIVATE YOUR POWER OF RESILIENCE.

#### *Cultivate a Positive Mindset*

- Focus on what you can control and let go of what you cannot.
- Reframe challenges as opportunities for growth.
- Practice gratitude daily to recognize the good in your life

#### *Build Strong Relationships*

- Surround yourself with supportive friends, family or mentors.
- Seek connection during tough times instead of isolating yourself.
- Offer support to others – it often strengthens your own resilience.

#### *Strengthen Emotional Regulation*

- Practice Meditation to stay grounded.
- Journal to help process your emotions.
- Listen to relaxing music.
- Learn to accept difficult feelings without letting them overwhelm you.

#### *Embrace Problem-Solving Skills*

- Break challenges into smaller, manageable tasks.
- Focus on the small wins, taking one day at a time.
- Seek creative solutions, stepping out of your comfort zone.

#### *Take Care of Your Body*

- Exercise regularly to boost your physical and mental illness.
- Eat a balanced diet to maintain energy and clarity.
- Prioritize sleep and rest for emotional regulation.

#### *Build Mental Toughness*

- Set achievable goals and work diligently towards them.

- Develop self-confidence by learning from past experiences.
- Accept failures as a learning experience rather than a setback.

#### *Seek Meaning and Purpose*

- Identify your values and stick to them.
- Engage in activities that give you a sense of purpose.
- Reflect and stay in alignment with your “why” so that you can stay motivated during challenges.

#### *Practice Compassionate Self Care*

- Treat yourself with kindness and give yourself grace when things don’t go the way you planned.
- Focus on growth.
- Celebrate when you achieve goals.

Sometimes during our activation of being resilient, our internal resistance shows up. This occasionally occurs when we resist change or growth out of fear or uncertainty.

### WHAT IS RESISTANCE?

Resistance refers to the act of opposing or withstanding something, often involving effort or struggle against external or internal forces. Resistance can manifest in various forms, such as physical resistance, emotional defiance, or social opposition.

### KEY POINTS TO OVERCOME INTERNAL RESISTANCE:

It is important to have self-awareness so that we can be in tune with our ability to fight against physical constraints or challenges that discourage us from fulfilling our God-given purpose. When we are emotionally and mentally healthy, we can disconnect from self-doubt, fear and anxieties that try to stagnate our faith and keep us from becoming who God has called us to be.

We push through procrastination, overcoming limiting beliefs with the wisdom to resist emotional manipulation.

We break the silence and stand up against oppression, injustice and societal norms.

We embrace who we are without apology and preserve our family traditions and beliefs, yet refuse to conform to the negativity and pains of our past.

When we activate the power of our resilience, we live beyond our struggles and strengthen ourselves with the characteristics of determination, courage, solidarity and the adaptability to connect with each other.

With resilience we can overcome trials, tribulations and setbacks with love, joy, and peace, for the good of ourselves, family and the communities we serve.



*Tarnesa Martin R.N. is a life and personal development coach who leads sessions in health awareness, education, and self-care that focus on enhancing one’s capabilities for becoming a better version of themselves. She is an author, speaker, educator, and leadership mentor. Her business is Empower To Live Better, LLC, and she may be reached at [empowertolivebetter@gmail.com](mailto:empowertolivebetter@gmail.com).*

# Letting Go

**D**uring the summer of 2024, I found myself observing an uncomfortable tension building up between my adult children over a pending divorce that was unfolding. They each had different perspectives and were not seeing eye to eye on anything. I watched them unnecessarily judging and criticizing each other. I began to worry that it might not be possible to experience peace in our family until the controversial divorce became final. Could they set aside their differences and enjoy each other's company during the holidays?

I turned to the one thing I knew I had control over and that was **setting my intention for what I wanted to see happen and then letting go of the outcome**. I used one of my tried-and-true law of attraction principles: **letting go**. (All 35 principles can be found here: [steppingintoalifeofjoy.com](http://steppingintoalifeofjoy.com).)

I decided that despite our family issues, I wanted to have an enjoyable Thanksgiving dinner like we've always had, where we'd gather and share stories and laugh and love each other unconditionally. I journaled for several days on my vision of experiencing ease and flow throughout the entire holiday season including the up-and-coming Thanksgiving dinner. I made a decision to let go of any worries that I knew I had no control over. Voila! I was surprised and delighted to see that God/Source Energy took care of everything. On the evening that we held our Thanksgiving dinner an intense snow squall hit haphazardly over certain areas around town. Some family members were unable to attend due to the treacherous road conditions. When the evening was over, I became very appreciative that our family gathering was fun and enjoyable, and I thought to myself "Thank you God, for having mother nature provide the

outside drama that might otherwise (if all had been in attendance) happened inside my house around the dinner table".

Another example of the power behind "letting go" happened when I was coaching a client. She had been dreading the holiday season and when I asked her why, she proceeded to tell me that her daughter-in-law always caused stress and drama at each family gathering. She then mentioned all the things she didn't like about her and ended her rampage of frustration by admitting she had lost all hope of ever having another happy holiday.

I asked her if she would be willing to let go of the belief that nothing would ever change? She happily agreed to try whatever I had in mind. I turned to another tried and true LoA principle (**focus on love and appreciation**).

I invited her to begin writing in a daily journal for 21 days (to build a habit) and if she felt inspired, she could continue writing throughout December. In her journal, I asked her to start compiling a list (one idea at a time) of things she appreciated about her daughter-in-law. I suggested she start with simple things such as she's a good cook, she is great at gardening, she's a devoted mother to her grandchildren etc. After her first week of working on the list she told me it had begun to feel difficult, so I invited her to call her son and/or any other family member and ask them what they loved, liked or enjoyed about his wife. This helped her come up with even more ideas of love and appreciation to write in her journal.

During our first coaching session in January, she told me that by the end of the holiday season she had proudly compiled a long list of things she appreciated

about her daughter-in-law. She was very excited to share the good news with me that during the entire holiday season she had been totally amazed that she and her daughter-in-law had happily enjoyed each other's company.

I congratulated her and reminded her that she attracted this experience because she chose to **let go** of her doubt that things would never change and then she chose to focus on the things she appreciated about her daughter-in-law. Like energy always attracts like energy so as she built a new habit of feeling good about her daughter-in-law, her daughter-in-law felt the difference and reflected (like a mirror) this good feeling energy back to her.

My focus for 2025 will be to pay attention to my emotions and when I'm feeling anxious about anything, I will choose to **let go** of all worrisome thoughts. My intention is to *walk my talk* so that I can help others see how easily and effortlessly things can fall into place when we let go of the illusion of needing to be in control. In fact, each time we make a choice to **let go and turn our worries over to God/Source Energy** we might find ourselves pleasantly surprised and delighted to receive (via LoA) an experience that is bigger and better than we could have ever imagined.



Suzanne Young is an intuitive life coach who specializes in the Law of Attraction. She is also an inspirational speaker, author, and co-owner of Personal Success Programs, since 2007, with her

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# Tell Your Story!

Seriously, once you share the hard stuff, several things happen:

- it's not as devastating because it's no longer hidden
- you actually "hear" it as told to someone else and can often make more sense of it
- your story helps someone else
- you take away the paralyzing power of what happened to you, and find redemptive power in the telling
- you look back from a new perspective, perhaps more wisdom, or compassion for the person you were.

We don't stay the same. Though your story may not change, how you respond to it can and probably will. You may gain insight. Or resolve. There is wisdom gleaned from experience!

I'll tell you right now that I *know* you have been through challenges or hard times, and that you learned something to either *not* repeat again, or that helped you survive or made life bearable.

Yes, my dear, you can glean from those things. And, realizing that our story is valuable often happens as we are sharing with someone what took place in our life.

It doesn't have to be big. It's usually just us living our lives, daily working through.

But, when we share our difficult and challenging moments with another person, somehow we become more aware in the telling. We realize that we were (are) powerful and creative problem solvers, and that we are stronger now.

And the person listening says they are so thankful to hear our story, or that they had "never thought of that", or that it's amazing to realize that they weren't the only one.....

There is so much power in our stories, in our lives.

So, don't be afraid to share your story. You will find others with chapters of the same. A kinship. A support.

And it matters.



*Mimi Matthews is in the "encouragement business" as the owner of Empowordment Cards by Mimi. She is also a speaker, workshop leader, writer, and our editor. Visit her shop at [www.etsy.com/shop/EmPOwordmentCards](http://www.etsy.com/shop/EmPOwordmentCards) and her blog at [www.particularpassions.me](http://www.particularpassions.me).*

Your Story  
Makes  
You Strong

***The more we disclose  
our defeats and  
difficulties, the less  
power they hold over us.***

# The Journey of Self-Acceptance

## My Weight Loss & Struggle with Identity

In May of 2005, I became a mother, bringing my son into the world. At that time, I weighed 560 pounds, and my doctor gave me a shocking warning: unless I made drastic changes, I wouldn't live to see my 30th birthday. This life-changing moment became the turning point for me. I knew I needed to take action, not only for my health but for my son, who deserved to have me around for years to come. In December 2005, I underwent gastric bypass surgery, and within eleven months, I had lost an incredible 350 pounds. While this weight loss saved my life and allowed me to be more active and present with my son, it also brought on emotional challenges I wasn't prepared for.

For as long as I can remember, I've struggled with my self-esteem. People would often say I was "beautiful for a big girl," but these compliments never really resonated with me. They seemed kind but didn't address the internal struggles I had with my body image. I felt like my weight defined who I was to the world. I knew people could see me, but they never saw me—my personality, my kindness, or my character. I felt like the elephant in the room, literally. I wanted the same attention my friends received, but instead, I was often ignored or overlooked in social situations.

As I lost 350 pounds, I was thrust into a completely different reality. For years, I had felt invisible, but now I was receiving overwhelming attention. While part of me was grateful for the newfound attention, a larger part of me felt uncomfortable. The attention I received was not always genuine—it was often based solely on my appearance, and sometimes it felt like men saw me as an easy target. Before surgery, I

had been perceived as someone who might be overlooked or treated unfairly due to my size. But now, it was as if the world was seeing me for the first time, but only on the surface.

In hindsight, I realize that the grass is not always greener on the other side. I had gone from either no attention at all or attention that made me feel like I was being taken advantage of, to receiving so much attention that it became overwhelming. There were moments when I didn't want to go out or wear certain clothes that I thought would make me happy. The clothes I had hoped would make me feel confident only made me feel like I was being put on display. It became difficult to separate genuine connections from superficial ones, and I often found myself wishing for the simplicity of my former life—when I knew that the people





who cared about me did so for who I was, not what I looked like.

What I didn't fully understand before my surgery was how drastically my life would change—not just physically, but in how people treated me. No one could have prepared me for how people would start speaking to me differently or how their approach to me would change.

When I was overweight, I was often treated with a certain level of respect, but after my weight loss, it felt like people saw me as a completely different person.

Some of the attention was flattering, but it was also overwhelming and left me

feeling disconnected from the woman I had always been.

The drastic shift in how I was perceived took a toll on my sense of self. I was no longer just Lynn, the woman who had a big heart but a large body. I was suddenly someone people looked at in ways I hadn't experienced before. And while I was physically healthier and more active, I found myself questioning whether people valued me for who I was, or just for my new appearance. The internal struggle between embracing my transformation and feeling like I had lost my true identity was overwhelming.

Though I don't regret my decision to have the surgery, as it gave me the chance to live longer and be active with my son, I do wish the process had better prepared me for the emotional challenges of such a dramatic physical transformation. The physical changes were profound, but the mental changes were just as significant, and not always in the ways I expected. My journey has taught me that losing weight doesn't automatically fix how you feel about yourself on the inside. It doesn't change the deep-rooted insecurities or the self-doubt that have been with you for years.

Now, at 43 years old, I still struggle with my self-image. When I look in the mirror,

I see someone who has undergone a remarkable transformation, but I also see someone who still feels conflicted. There are moments when I wish others could look beyond my appearance to see the person I truly am. Despite the dramatic change in my body, I am still the same Lynn Nicole—someone

who values kindness, integrity, and a good moral compass.

What I have learned through this experience is that true self-worth is not defined by how we look but by who we are. The core of self-esteem lies in our character, not in our appearance. Even though

my outward appearance has changed, I am still the same person on the inside. I am still Lynn Nicole—the caring, loving woman who believes in kindness and empathy, no matter what I see in the mirror.

Ultimately, my journey has taught me that beauty comes from within, and true self-love is about embracing who you are, not just how you look. Despite the external changes, I am still Lynn Nicole, and I am learning to accept myself for who I truly am, both inside and out. My weight loss may have changed how others see me, but it hasn't changed the essence of who I am. And that, in the end, is what matters the most.



*Lynn Nicole Turner is a seasoned mental health professional with 20+ years of experience. Specializing in suicide prevention and high acuity patients, she is a trusted counselor, addiction treatment specialist, and certified life coach. Lynn's dedication extends to mentoring young women and advocating for the vulnerable in mental health. [www.linkedin.com/in/lynnnturner](http://www.linkedin.com/in/lynnnturner)*

**"It became difficult to separate genuine connections from superficial ones, and I often found myself wishing for the simplicity of my former life—when I knew that the people who cared about me did so for who I was, not what I looked like."**





# Loving Our tiny cuts

A reminder to pause  
when we hurt ourselves.

**T**he universe is like a mirror, showing us different angles of ourselves. I have come to believe that we unconsciously attract experiences that show us what we need to see in that mirror. It is through this reflection that we learn what we need to see in order to understand ourselves and come into better alignment.

I am writing this after an accidental cut with a kitchen knife. I strive to approach all of my experiences with intention and curiosity, looking for the little lessons in every moment. My current journey involves learning how to care for myself in every moment and respecting the natural processes of my body.

I have come to understand that the human body has its own innate capability to heal itself and I put this into practice in all of my activities. This knowledge has changed my approach to minor cuts such as this one. I no longer reach for Band-Aids or try to clean cuts with alcohol or even water. Instead, I grab a clean rag and lay down until I am done bleeding.

I've learned to trust the natural process of bleeding, which serves as a cleansing mechanism itself. As the blood clots over about 20 minutes, it forms a natural "liquid Band-Aid" that is far more effective than any store-bought product. By allowing this process to happen, I've noticed that cuts heal much faster and I'm usually able to resume activity without bleeding within 30 minutes. The conventional way of treating a cut would have me nursing a painful swollen cut and soggy Band-Aid for over a week. Alternatively, by taking the time for myself and letting nature do its thing, the healing time reduces significantly, there is minimal pain and the cut often disappears within a couple days without any visible scar.

I wonder if this cut was in fact an accident? I've noticed that I only hurt myself when I'm pushing too hard. As a homesteader, I am grateful for this life, but it often means there are many tasks to complete in a limited amount of time (which is not my favorite part). Leading up to the task that produced this tiny cut, I took a moment to consciously decide if I needed more rest before tackling another major kitchen project. Though I felt like

I could use a 20-minute break for silence, the day was already getting late. So, I decided to compromise and take only two minutes of rest before starting on my big job. But as fate would have it, five minutes into my project, I nicked my finger, causing it to bleed, forcing that 20 minute break and a chance to finally slow down and be more conscious of my finger and myself.

This is a reminder to notice when we hurt ourselves, and take the time to pause; Is there a hidden meaning behind our current situation? Let this cut be a metaphor. This introspection isn't just a habit of mine when I have a small cut. In moments of great physical or emotional pain, I also tend to reflect on my life and myself in this manner. I pay attention to when I'm hurting and take the time to observe my thoughts and actions, as well as the messages being sent back to me by my environment. Then, I focus on what is needed to adjust myself to better align with time, space, reality, and myself in the present moment.

In that moment of forced stillness, as the blood slowly coagulated and formed a protective shield over the wound, I closed my eyes and allowed myself to sink into the quiet of introspection. The subtle throbbing in my finger served as a reminder to slow down, to listen to the whispers of my body and soul that often went unheard amidst the clamor of daily life.

As I sat there, cradling my injured finger, I felt a sense of gratitude wash over me. Gratitude for this moment of reflection, and for the opportunity to realign myself with the rhythm of nature and my own being.

All the best!  
Joy Dettling



*Joy Dettling of Ignite Life specializes in helping individuals release unseen stuck stress patterns and embody their true potential. To find out more, visit [ignitelife.net](http://ignitelife.net) or contact [joy@ignitelife.net](mailto:joy@ignitelife.net).*

# Meatball Tortellini Soup

## SIMPLIFY FAMILY DINNER WITH A ONE-POT SOUP

(Culinary.net)

**A**fter a busy season of groups and gatherings, sometimes a new year calls for easy, filling meals you can enjoy with your nearest and dearest. Warm, hearty Meatball Tortellini Soup can do just that as a delicious one-pot solution. Visit Culinary.net to find more warming winter recipes.

### MEATBALL TORTELLINI SOUP

*Servings: 6-8*

- 4 cups beef broth
- 1 can (14 ounces) diced tomatoes
- 16 ounces frozen meatballs
- 19 ounces tortellini
- 6 ounces frozen spinach
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 3/4 cup Parmesan cheese, plus additional for serving, divided salt & pepper to taste
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- bread, for serving

In Dutch oven, pour in beef broth and diced tomatoes. Fill empty diced tomatoes can with water and add to pot. Stir in meatballs, tortellini and spinach. Cook over medium heat then add onion powder, garlic powder, Italian seasoning and 3/4 cup Parmesan cheese. Add salt and pepper, to taste.

Cook 25 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add heavy cream and cook 5 minutes.

Serve with bread and additional Parmesan cheese.

*Recipe courtesy of "Cookin' Savvy"*



# Body Confidence

If you aren't enough without it, you will never be enough with it.

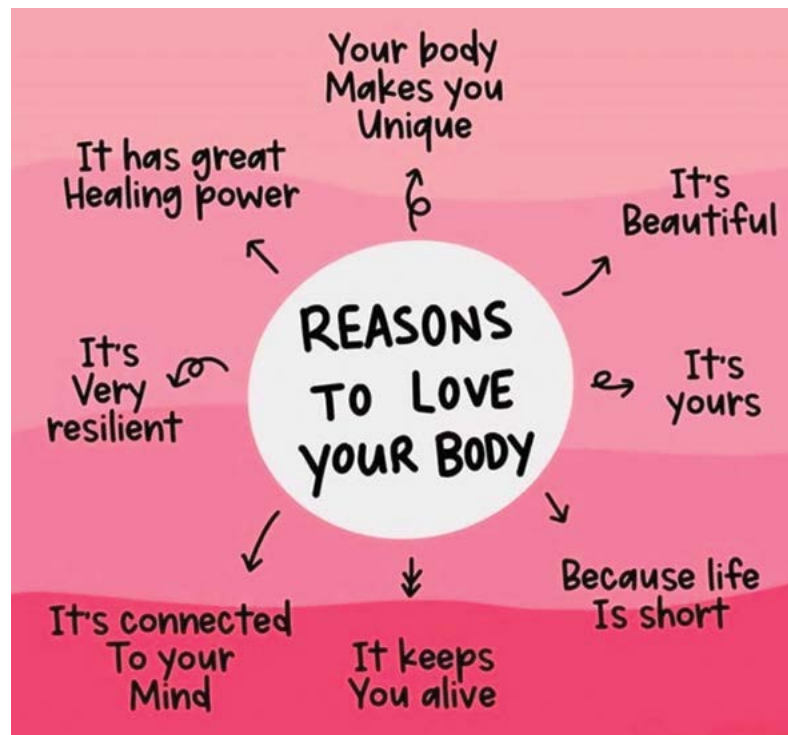
BY EMILY COWEN

**M**y confidence has never really come from my body. My confidence has always been despite my body. Living in a larger body, surprisingly, I never felt AS negatively impacted by body image as some, however, no one remains unscathed from body shaming. In my younger years, I too fell victim to a lot of side effects of prevalent weight stigma and fat phobia embedded in our culture.

My journey began in earnest after a life altering series of events. Both my parents died six months apart and I was injured in an auto accident as I was driving to work one morning. An agonizing and painstakingly long recovery served as the catalyst to reclaim both my body and body image.

I had tried to "work on myself" mostly through dieting, but it came from a place of lacking, longing, willpower, and ultimately whether I liked to admit or not, underlying shame and lack of true understanding of myself. Motivations based in lack usually don't last long or sustain you on a personal growth journey. I began to realize my body had been through so much. It carried me through six intense spinal surgeries, three superbug infections, and the reality that I might never walk unassisted again.

Eventually, enough was enough. My body didn't deserve any negativity, certainly not from me. I vowed to start reclaiming my body from a place of compassion, loving acceptance, care, and nourishment, instead of from a lens of solely "fixing problems." How could I ever be ashamed of my body when it has carried me through such terrible places? During my recovery I lost over



100lbs and my body began to not only survive, but thrive.

After losing weight both literally and metaphorically, I had come to view my body with more neutrality and even positivity. But I was faced with an even bigger challenge. Over the last year I dealt with a double mastectomy and reconstruction. I felt pressure (mostly self-imposed) to handle the process like a champ because part of my job as an Integrative Nutritionist is body image coaching. I know I am not my body, I am so much more, yet to care is to be human.

My reconstruction process was very slow, with hard-to-process twists along the way. As my breasts were slowly being rebuilt over months, I found myself frustrated and making comments while dressing like, "I look weird." My loved ones would assure me I didn't look weird, and people wouldn't notice. But people do notice, and we can't pretend people in "unconventional" bodies don't get looks or pressure in our culture. It's hard telling someone who cares to simply not care.

And it's okay to care about or be bothered by things like cultural norms surrounding body aesthetics, but it's about how much weight you give to it. It's about how much energy, emotion, and time you let those passing thoughts steal from you. Meet them when they come, view them as "interesting" with curiosity instead of virtue signaling, but then watch them go. A thought is just that, a thought; it's not YOU. Besides, at my funeral NO ONE will be talking about my breasts, my height, my pant size, or my scars. People remember how we make them feel.

If you think body neutrality and acceptance are forms of resignation, I implore you to ask yourself: “Who ultimately benefits from perpetuating body shame?” Remember, there is money to be made off of your insecurities. Literally BILLIONS are made every year off of your body shame. A big component of body shame doesn’t inherently come from inside of you, it’s influenced by limiting beliefs and negative/critical thinking. An important question to ask yourself is, “Who does this belong to?” “What version of my younger self is getting triggered by my present day body image struggles? Which version of my younger self is really asking for love and acceptance in those harshly triggered moments? How might you diversify your influences moving forward or limit the harmful ones?”

We often think and feel that if we focus on changing our bodies it will lead to greater body satisfaction. Research shows the opposite is true. Shame has never and will never be a long-lasting motivational tool. Shame keeps you unhealthy in the long run. If shame really works, it would have worked a long time ago.

Body acceptance is not a resignation, it’s empowerment. A 2017 study on women found that body appreciation was the KEY factor between women having interceptive awareness and actually having responsiveness—in other words, actually doing something about it. It’s one thing to hear your body’s needs, but it doesn’t really matter if you aren’t able to respond to these messages in a timely manner. Appreciation for your body paves the way for a deeper connection and a symbiotic relationship with yourself. The studies are clear: the more body appreciation you have the more likely you are to care for your body. When you are at war with your body or postpone living your life until your body reaches some goal, you are, in essence, living with conditions on yourself. Self-trust flourishes by positive regard for yourself. Diet culture and body fixation undermine self-trust. The problem is not your body—

it’s the self-worth, virtue, and identity that culture has projected onto the body. Acceptance is a pathway to freedom.

Have you ever looked back at photos of a younger version of yourself and thought, “Wow, I would kill to have that body again. I can’t believe I used to struggle with or hate my body in that time period, in that body, and in that picture.” This is proof that the problem has never really been your body, but your thoughts and beliefs about your body.

Your body is forever your home. When you start appreciating it more and being more grateful for your body, you will inevitably give it what it needs. Your body is a miracle, and so are you. So, show up for yourself this New Year, maybe in a different way than you are accustomed to when pursuing health and wellness goals and resolutions. Let yourself bloom in love this year, instead of trying harder to force growth through control, punishment, disdain, shame, and hate. Remember that growth and healing are rarely linear, and positive or neutral body image health is a process—like much in life—that requires patience, attention, care, and compassion.

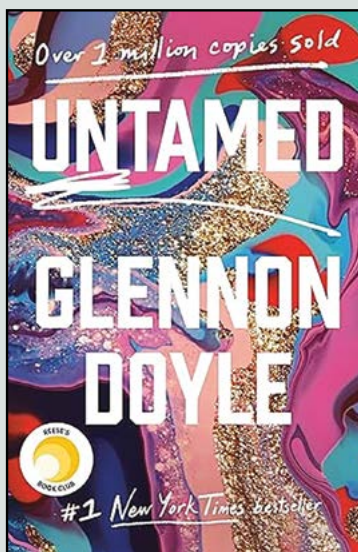


*Emily Cowen is a certified Integrative Nutrition Health Coach and graduated from the Institute for Integrative Nutrition (New York) where she learned innovative coaching methods, practical lifestyle management techniques, and over 100 dietary theories - Ayurveda, gluten-free, Paleo, raw, vegan, macrobiotics, and everything in between.*

*She has completed Intuitive Eating Pro Skills Training and holds a Natural Holistic Remedies Certification. To learn more visit [www.phoenixtransform.com](http://www.phoenixtransform.com).*

# Book Club Classics

## Books that Change You



### Untamed

by Glennon Doyle

***“Untamed will liberate women—emotionally, spiritually, and physically. It is phenomenal.”—Elizabeth Gilbert, author of City of Girls and Eat Pray Love***

There is a voice of longing inside each woman. We strive so mightily to be good: good partners, daughters, mothers, employees, and friends. We hope all this striving will make us feel alive. Instead, it leaves us feeling weary, stuck, overwhelmed, and underwhelmed. We look at our lives and wonder: Wasn’t it all supposed to be more beautiful than this? We quickly silence that question, telling ourselves to be grateful, hiding our discontent—even from ourselves.

# Go Green with Home Cleaners

(Family Features)

If you're among those looking for ways to clean your home while also going green, it may be easier than you think.

Consider these easy and affordable solutions to help you live more environmentally friendly. You may be surprised to find you already have many of these household products on hand.

## BAKING SODA

A natural, safe, effective and gentle solution, baking soda can serve multiple home cleaning needs. Make a paste of three parts baking soda to one part water. Rub onto silver with a clean cloth or sponge. Rinse thoroughly and dry for shining serving or decor pieces. Additionally, you can sprinkle baking soda on upholstery and carpet to get rid of odors.

## VINEGAR

With the acidity to help get rid of dirt and grime around the home, vinegar can be used to clean cloudy glassware. Simply soak paper towels or a cloth in full-strength white distilled vinegar and wrap around both the inside and outside of the glass. Let sit before rinsing clean. To remove lime deposits on your tea kettle, add 1/2 cup distilled white vinegar to the water and let it sit overnight. In the morning, boil the vinegar for a few minutes then rinse with water.

## LEMONS

With a fresh, natural smell, lemons have the acidity to remove soap scum, clean and shine brass and remove hard water deposits. Just spray some lemon juice on tile surfaces to remove soap scum or hard water deposits. Squeeze lemon juice on a cloth and use to polish brass around the home.

## HOUSEPLANTS

Plants serve as natural air purifiers. African violets and ferns are beautiful ways to help clear the air.

Other easy, green ideas for keeping your home clean include opening windows and doors while you clean to improve air quality and taking off your shoes when you come inside, which can help avoid tracking dust, dirt, pollen and more throughout the house.

Visit [eLivingtoday.com](http://eLivingtoday.com) for more eco-friendly advice.  
Photo courtesy of Unsplash.



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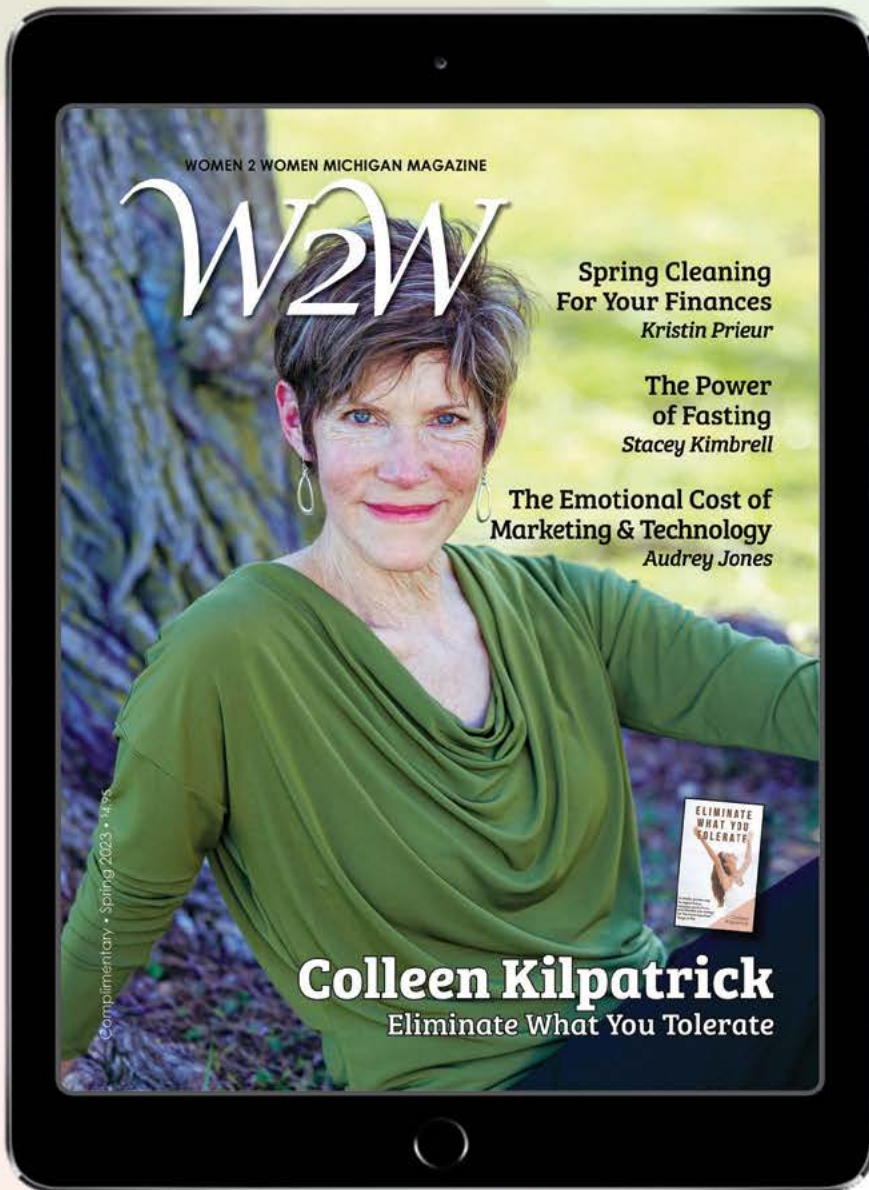
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