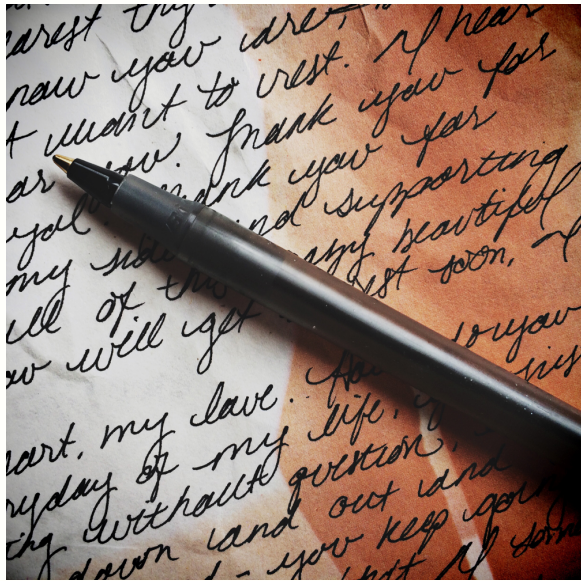


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A Love Letter to *My Body*



Last year I taught a "Love Your Body" workshop with my dear friend, Stacie. I like to call her the "beauty maker" because she's known for making everything she touches, beautiful.

I arrived at the conference room the morning of the workshop to help with set up and was welcomed with soft lighting, roses in vases and scented candles. It was stunning. We had planned several activities, including art projects, writing exercises, group scenarios, etc. I stopped for a moment and thought to myself how excited I was that we would be transforming women's lives today, that we would be making a great impact toward their emotional health regarding their bodies.

The day started with a presentation by me where I talked about how we get so caught up in the latest nutrition fads, that we often create much guilt and frustration. I talked about how those two emotions were much more detrimental to our bodies than say, eating the occasional piece of chocolate cake. The whole group, including myself, laughed heartily at the end when one woman raised her hand and said, "So, your point is that we should go home and make a chocolate cake?" "Yes!" I exclaimed, "as long as it's made from scratch!"

The next exercise consisted of making life-sized outlines of our bodies and then decorating them with positive and uplifting adjectives and other words. We lay on giant sheets of paper on the floor and our friends took fat markers and ran them around the edges of our bodies. There was a lot of laughing and Twister-like movements as we struggled to be accurate in our tracings.

For our next activity, we went back into the room with the roses and candles. We dimmed the lights. Everyone sat at a table and Stacie, an experienced massage therapist, began her presentation about the "range of normal" as far as bodies go. She talked about how she had seen every body type out there and how they were all fascinating and beautiful to her. She also mentioned how women were known for apologizing profusely for their unshaven legs, their smells, their un-manicured

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toenails and hands, the lack of moisturizer on their elbows, etc. She told us that, conversely, the men she worked on generally accepted their bodies, along with the normal aspects of them, such as the smells, the hair, and the skin, the different shapes of things.

After her enlightening presentation, Stacie passed around blank pieces of old stationary from the eighties. The pages were printed with faint pictures of people walking on the beach and had cliché sayings typed across the bottom like, “Loving you is the second best thing I’ve done, finding you is the first.” The point was that, though it was silly stationary meant to be used to write a love letter to a partner, we were supposed to write a letter to our bodies -- a *love* letter.

Since I was part of the audience now, I joined, thinking I would “be a good example” and take part in our amazing workshop as a participant. I couldn’t have known how this exercise would impact me.

I cried.

It’s not often that I cry as a presenter or “authority figure” when I’m teaching, but in the midst of this exercise, I did.

Less than two years before, I nearly died just after giving birth to my baby girl. I had developed eclampsia. My liver almost ruptured, I had a grand

mal seizure and I lost a tremendous amount of blood. The doctor who took over my care (when things decidedly moved outside the range of normal birth) took my father aside some hours after the incident, and told him that he didn’t understand how I was still alive. He had never seen a woman live through an experience like this.

Staring at the stationary, I recalled this, my mind racing a million miles a minute. I had a sudden realization that I had been angry at my body all this time for “failing” me. What came to me is that my body had not failed, but had *survived!* It had fought with all its might to stay alive during the onslaught of a disease that is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of women throughout the world, *every day.*

My perspective had flipped so instantly, that I began writing very quickly and almost frenetically. Here is an excerpt:

Dearest body,

Wow. There’s so much to say. Firstly, thank you for not dying on me when your liver was over-taxed and your heart was barely hanging on. Thank you for making it through the several years of unrelenting work, even though you are very tired and still healing.

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Liver, you are still working after all you've been through. How absolutely miraculous is that! It shouldn't have even been possible, but you did it! You fought and fought to keep working for our survival. Thank you so much for that. You can't possibly know how much I love you for that.

My dearest heart, I don't know how you do it — how you just keep beating day after day, minute after minute. I know that the pregnancy and birth were hard for you. I don't know how you ever got through it. Sometimes during that time, you beat so fast, I thought I was going to lose you, but somehow, you just kept on going. You know I couldn't have carried my angel baby girl without you, right? I know you're still healing. I know there were many times you wanted to give up, many times you didn't think you could go on, but you didn't quit. You carried me through. You enabled me to bring this baby into my life and she lived! We lived! Thank you for the greatest gift I could have ever imagined.

I will always care for you, body. I respect you so much and will do all I can to support you and love you and treat you with kindness, because, quite simply, you've always done the same for me.

*Much love,
Melissa*

Since that exercise, I've had times that I've been frustrated with my body. I'm sure, like any relationship, that will always be the case, but my underlying feelings toward my body are those of respect and love for all it has done, and continues to do for me.

I invite you to use the stationary below to write your own love letter to your body. It changed my life for the better and I know it will change yours, too.

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