

I've Gotta Be Me

*Maybe Ol' Blue Eyes
got it right.*

*Authenticity very well
might be the key to happiness.*

Recently, I put an Amber Alert out on myself and thankfully, I responded. Believe me, I know how crazy that must sound. I'm a self-diagnosed victim of – wait for it – a heart attack. It's not a cardiac issue, but rather a battle between the heart and the head. It's a condition that strikes innocent, unassuming women (and perhaps men) of all shapes and sizes. It's unrelenting, often irreversible, and will blow the ego, the id and the super-ego to smithereens if you let it. There's no pill you can pop, no homeopathic remedy you can deploy, and no doctor will diagnose it for you. You've just got to hit rock bottom and then claw, fight, and battle your way back to yourself.

Have you ever awakened one day only to discover that the most obvious thing that was missing in your world was you? Let me explain. As most of my PhillyFIT friends and family know, in the past few years I've managed to overcome a few rough curveballs – more like jumbo medicine balls thrown at my stomach when I wasn't looking, or ready. In dealing with life's unexpected sorrows, I discovered that my coping mechanism was to retreat and become somewhat of a hermit. Ugh, hello? So not me, right? I went radio silent. I was, for the first time, in a long time, quiet. I consciously tried to enjoy being a reclusive, understated wallflower, but then one day it hit me. I was much better being a monkey than a monk! I had to dig deep (and I mean like five hundred feet below sea level) to try to remember what it was that I enjoyed so much about my life during happier times.

I landed on the simple things. You know, just brewing a fresh pot of coffee, trying out a new conditioner for my hair,



doing a cool craft project on the dining room table with all three of my kids. You know, the little things.

“When a long, slow-brewed, fresh pot of ground coffee gets replaced with super-quick K-cups and Monopoly gets replaced with Minecraft, something changes. When your sneakers take a back seat to quick car trips (neighborhood travel made easy), something changes. And when suddenly buckets of fried chicken grace your table instead of fresh, organic veggies, homemade roasted-pepper hummus, and delicious parmesan-encrusted tilapia, well, something just changes. Believe me, I'd like to say that these references are all exaggerations, but sadly, they're not. In a short time my entire family was acting, thinking, and feeling like a robotic, gluttonous bunch of morons – myself included. We opted for easy instead of optimal. We said, “Yes,” when we should have said, “No way.” We became “PhillyFAT and sassy” as they say, teetering on what felt like lazy and well, very American. Ugh, sorry, yes, I went there. We were looking more like the Simpsons each passing day. What happened to those energetic, happy-go-lucky busybodies who never quit going? We were consuming more, spending more, wasting more, wanting more, eating more, drinking more, and sleeping more. Yes, we were turning into a cohesive unit of crazies in a wasteland of politically incorrect zombies. Even my little Savannah came down with a case of mall-itis. We were hittin' the malls instead of the gym like we used to together. I knew

it had to stop but it was a runaway train sponsored by Apple, Frito-Lay, and Forever 21. Geez, how can anyone stop that? We found ourselves living and being totally different than we had ever known our lives to be in the past. But why? How does this happen?

I became a charlatan, a fraud, and a fake – here I was pushing out PhillyFIT Magazine while eating a Devil Dog (what an appropriate name for this snack food). That was my rock bottom. But what to do? What to do? I retreated to a place that made me happy. Not my getsgoodmileagecar – but my ohtoo-cool PhillyFIT truck. Being behind the wheel in this old friend automatically gave me a zing and catapulted me into a place that I had been missing. Holy \$#(+ ! I found myself! Where the hell have I been, for goodness' sake? I cranked up the tunes, rolled down the window and waved hello to strangers on the street as I blasted REO Speedwagon (sue me).

*I can't fight this feelin' anymore.
I've forgotten what I started fightin' for.
It's time to bring this ship into the shore
and throw away the oars, forever.
Baby, I can't fight this feelin' anymore!"*

(Now, I bet you're singing it too. Ha!).

Yeah, I got a few looks especially from Millennials who have never heard this classic rock ballad, but mostly I got whoo-hoos and high-fives from other onlookers. It felt good – I mean really good. I went ten miles on familiar roads, and suddenly I was back in my own skin. I was Jami Lynn Appenzeller again, and for the first time in about six months or so, I told myself that I would never again fall prey to the Body Snatchers – a.k.a. all sorts of friends and acquaintances who wanted to change me to suit *their* needs and wants. I had become what other people wanted me to be this past year and that was the problem – a really big problem. When you're busy trying to act a certain way, be a certain way, you get lost and everything you hold precious, even memories, somehow fade to black.

Sure, we all need to go a different direction in life from time to time, but the key is to remain true to you. If you don't like foie gras, then don't eat it. If you don't like to read "Little Women," don't read it. If you don't want to wear fur or jewels... oh, you get the idea. And remember, this idea doesn't just apply to lovers – you could be majorly influenced by all sorts of people. More on this in a bit.

If you are reading this and have sadly found yourself treading water in a pool that someone else filled for you (no matter who that person is), take it from me, you will find your own life preserver. It may not be tomorrow, but it will get better. I was nothing but an unfeeling android before that fateful day I sang REO Speedwagon in my truck. Seriously, as each month went by, I was drowning in emotional quicksand. I felt trapped and well, stupid for not staying true to my own dreams and goals. I found I just shut out my inner voice, my conscious and my own female intuition. And I know better! In the end, I blame myself. I'm lucky that my own awakening was my life preserver. Others go years, not months, in a state of bewilderment and sorrow.

So yeah, Sinatra got it right, although he was slightly dramatic about it. These lyrics are profound yet definitely ring true even in our modern times. Sadly, the South Philadelphia mural I loved so much of the man himself is no longer there due to a newish real-estate project. It was originally painted

Jami's Five Self-Worth Revelations:

1. Just because your past has a smudge doesn't mean your future has to be valueless. Move on and don't look back. Don't let a teacher, a psychologist, or a first date get the best of you. People with authority may in fact abuse it.
2. You're not alone. Nobody's perfect (two clichés that taste great together). Perfection is something that can only be faked, not truly lived – and not every day. No matter how well it's covered up, underneath it all we are all beautifully damaged in some way.
3. Stop snubbing your reflection. Maybe it's time for you to start owning everything that you are. Erase those stupid untrue rules that you put on your worth. You don't have to be a certain size to be beautiful. You don't have to be liked by everyone to feel significant. You don't have to have everything to feel like nothing is missing. Comparison is the thief to all joy. Remember, enjoy the things you have, and don't worry one bit about the things you don't have.
4. What you choose to focus on is what you will feel. Insecurities lose power once you stop measuring your life, and start appreciating your life. Spend more time in the yin and less in the yang if you know what I mean. The choice is yours. No more "yangers" in your life. Let's all make a pact to never go "there" again.
5. Nothing about you is inept. We are all a little broken in our own little way, and the last time I checked, broken crayons still color the same! Your flaws make you you. That's what's amazing about life!

in 1999 by artist Diane Keller via Philly's beloved Mural Arts Program, commemorating the one-year anniversary of the death of "Ol' Blue Eyes."

*Whether I'm right or whether I'm wrong
Whether I find a place in this world or never belong.
I gotta be me, I've gotta be me!
What else can I be but what I am?
I want to live, not merely survive
And I won't give up this dream of life that keeps me alive.
I gotta be me, I gotta be me!
The dream that I see makes me what I am
That faraway prize, a world of success
Is waiting for me if I heed the call
I won't settle down, won't settle for less
As long as there's a chance that I can have it all
I'll go it alone, that's how it must be
I can't be right for somebody else
If I'm not right for me.
I gotta be free, I've gotta be free!
Daring to try, to do it or die,
I've gotta be me.*



Bottom line? I can't tell you how many of my friends are still living for someone who has influenced them, or something. For example, their boss, or father sways them, or still in a job they hate, driving a car they can't stand and wearing clothing that was picked out by dear ol' Ma! What? "Stop the madness," I say.

Today I live by a brand-new mantra: **"Don't ever let anyone make you believe that your dreams and the lifestyle that you have carved out for yourself are insignificant in comparison to what they believe is 'best for you.'"** In your heart of hearts, you know where happiness hides. Don't let others tell you where to look. And, try not to withdraw from your sense of self and go quiet like I did. In hindsight, I suppose I may have needed that downtime to be introspective, but it truly got me nowhere. I say it's time to be noisy again. Yay!

Things not feeling exactly like yourself lately? Make a change! Change whom you're spending most of your time

with; change the places you frequent. Yes, maybe even consider switching gyms for a new, refreshing change of pace. Consider changing up your diet and the way you walk to work. Change the way you do your hair, the music you listen too. Variety is the spice of life and the spices that taste the best are the ones you sprinkle yourself!

~ ~ ~

Hey, it's getting warmer. Get out there and get (Philly) FIT! And if you see me in my PhillyFIT truck, don't forget to wave!

Best,



letterstothepublisher

Hi Jami!

I am a devoted fan of your mag. Read it cover to cover. It helps because I workout 3 nights a week ... and I feel terrific.
~Steve Gerace



Dear Jami,

I love how you share all your feelings in Phillyfit, It's much more inspiring (in Spirit) than perhaps you realize. It's my favorite part of the magazine. Although our bodies are a top priority and need to stay in shape to be healthy, we are more than just "our body." I enjoy and love how you know that, and express it by exploring our spirit and emotions. Keep up the Good (God) work. It is your calling.
~ Mary Coleen McDonnell

~ Mary Coleen McDonnell



Hi Jami:

I feel you do all of us who try to be fit, a big service with your magazine and great articles on how to keep in shape and healthy. Thank you Jami. Am sending you a grateful hug via e-mail.
~ Tony Sharayko

~ Tony Sharayko



Jami,

I read your editors page with more than a passing interest as it seems to mirror my own life and experiences to a "T." It's nice to know you're not alone when going through the dark hours. Thank you for having the courage to bare your self on those pages. It has meant more than you know to one reader at least.
~ Walt Bloom

~ Walt Bloom



Dear Jami,

I feel like I know you in some respects because you are so open in your writing. That is the best part of reading your magazine. You really have a way of sharing life experience and perspectives that touches people and their own lives.
~ Phil Newmoyer, Collegeville

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Published by: Jalynn Concepts, LLC

Publisher: Jami Appenzeller

Copy Editors: Heather Hoehn, John Beeler, R.I.P. Bev Appenzeller

Publisher's Page: Photo of Jami by Joe Chielli, Church Street Studios, Philadelphia, PA.; Hair by Amy Cummins of Fresh Hair Studio, Southampton, PA.; Makeup by Lisa Nocera

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Advertising Deadlines: Call PhillyFIT Magazine at (267) 767-4205 for upcoming issue deadlines.

Cover Photography: Ekene Ajufo photo by Jared Neders, SMN Designs.

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