



The Courage to Be You – To Live Your Life, Your Way

Singer Susan Boyle's story is a wonderful example of the importance of hanging onto your dream and living your life your way

Courage comes in many forms. A more famous example is actress Jenny McCarthy, who found strengths she never knew she had until her son Evan was diagnosed as autistic. It's a woman named Monica Jorge, who was recently on Oprah. Monica entered the hospital to give birth to her second child and came out with a daughter but no arms and legs, after contracting

flesh eating disease during her hospital stay. Yet,

despite the stunning blow that life's dealt her, she's thankful for the good things in her life and coping with the devastating hand (no pun intended) that she's been dealt.

While the two previous examples are well-known acts of courage, in my life as a life and business

coach and as a student here on planet Earth, I see courageous acts day in and day out, which while not as publicized, are no less deserving of comment and praise. It's the woman who decides that she's deserving of some down time and starts setting limits with her bewildered family, who aren't too keen about Mom's struggle for emancipation. It's my fellow cancer survivors, who face death squarely in the eyes, and summon tremendous courage to go through the medical treatments (chemotherapy) that will make them so sick that they'll *want* to die. It's the adult child who stands up to a parent for the first time, reversing years of emotional and verbal abuse. And it's the client who decides to leave their unfulfilling but well paying job for work that has meaning to them.

Courage is a timely topic for this month's edition of *Exceptionalife Magazine* because given the current economic conditions that the world finds itself in, we are being asked to summon

the kind of courage that most of us have never had to summon before. While those in their 70s and 80s proved their metal as a result of having lived through the Great Depression and the Second World War, those of us who are younger have had it relatively easy. We've experienced unprecedented periods of prosperity, with the exception of the 1980s when interest rates were over 20 per cent. My firm belief is that when we are on the other end of this global re-ordering – I really prefer that wording to global and economic meltdown – the world will look different, as will we, much improved models of strength, courage and tenacity than the 2008-2009 model.

So while courage comes in many forms, I believe that one of the most courageous things – and certainly one of the most satisfying – is to hang onto our personal dreams, regardless of the obstacles and challenges we face and to live our life, our way. (Sing it Frank, who was well known for doing it *his way*.)

And if the world's reaction to Susan Boyle, a middle aged, frumpy Scott, who wowed the judge's recently on the British TV show, Britain's Got Talent is any indication, many agree with me. Boyle, unemployed, who the British press said could really, really benefit from a makeover using her choice of dress as evidence (they said it resembled a giant doily), showed incredible courage by remaining on the stage after the acerbic Simon Cowell (of American idol fame) and the audience rolled their eyes after she told them "I've always wanted to perform in front of a large audience. I'm going to make this audience rock."

And rock them she did, during her performance in mid-April and the rest of the world since becoming a You Tube sensation and a darling of the media set. Susan's success, I believe, taps into our culture's love of the underdog, and our admiration for those who choose courage over cowardliness and optimism over fear. While experiencing these periods

are challenging to say the least – a look at the audience's disbelieving faces when Susan told them she was going to rock their world demonstrates this point – the rewards for hanging onto your dream against all odds can be great as what followed illustrates. The world has fallen in love with Susan and word has it that she's being considered for a part in a Broadway show.

While the rewards for choosing courage over cowardice and optimism over fear might not be as great as Susan's, I've seen time and time again in my practice how the people who flex these muscles on a regular basis end up leading a life that they love. As a coach, my primary responsibility is to help clients achieve their Big A agenda, which is to help them create and live a resonant life, one that is based on what's important to them.

To practice flexing your courage muscles, do the following:

- Pretend you're at the end of your life and you're doing a life review. What *must* you have done and who must you have been to make your life happy and meaningful to you? With this in mind, what is the first step you can take to move you closer to your vision?
- If you are feeling conflicted between what you want to do and what you've been told is OK to do, it's time to look at your tribal beliefs. Tribal beliefs are a set of unwritten rules that are passed down to us from our families and other cultural, religious or social organizations about the way life works, what defines a good person and how we should live our lives. Tribal beliefs, if they aren't ours but the tribes, can limit *our* choices and can cause anxiety, fatigue, depression and eventually physical illness.
- If you could erase the influence of your family, friends or our culture, who would you be and what would you be doing?

In a world that uses advertising and tribal beliefs to mold our behaviour into a one size fits all persona, it takes a lot of courage to flex your courage muscles and be your truth authentic self and all that you can be. Or as Frank sang, to do it "your way." If I've failed to convince you of the payoffs for doing so, then be altruistic and do it for the rest of us. Why? Because at this point in time, given the earth's delicate state and the economic re-ordering that is going on, I strongly believe that the only way we'll get through it is by celebrating our diversity, our different strengths and celebrating the gifts that only we can offer at this or any other moment in time. As a former coach of mine and I often joked, if you're Jamoca Almond Fudge and not the more popular vanilla, chocolate or strawberry, revel in your Jamoca Almond

Fudgeness, because the world is richer (and tastier) because of you. Which leads me to wonder what flavour Susan Boyle would describe herself as?

By Kathy Santini