



Lifted.

almost exactly a year ago, i wrote a post titled “fog” – and that piece was a description of where i was at in my life at the time, and served as the beginnings of therapy and a bit of a heads-up for those around me who felt something was off but didn’t know quite what to say or how to approach the topic ...

i am in a very different space than i was a year ago. i feel refreshed, i feel happy, i feel like myself. and that is why i am calling this post “lifted” – as in, the fog has lifted. if you care to read more about my journey – what helped, what didn’t, how i’ve changed since then – then keep scrolling. and if you ever need someone to listen to you, or talk to you, or just simply be with you for a quiet minute, i will do that for you – so many people offered that to me in the past year+ and it is my turn to pass on that

much-appreciated gesture of love.

fog ... setting in ... (the recap):

In 2020, we (the world!) dealt with the Covid-19 pandemic in full force – the novel disease, the unknown, the unanswerable questions, so much uncertainty and fear ...

In 2021, we (my family) managed a foster-care situation that was way too much for us. It left us feeling pretty ragged, defeated, and beaten down.

In 2022, we (Alex & I) turned our focus to piecing me back together, and then piecing us back together. This is the story of 2022 ...

fog ... lifting ... (the recovery):

Shortly after my initial post on this topic in 2022, we very abruptly and unexpectedly lost our dog, Stella. On February 20, 2022, Stella went out for a morning walk with Alex & Emma, jumping and playing as normal, ate her breakfast in typical Stella-vacuum fashion ... and by lunch time she was lying on the kitchen floor, unresponsive, with shallow and labored breathing. We took her to the emergency vet clinic, carried her in, and in less than 10 minutes of arriving, she had died – before we even had a chance to decide if we were going to proceed with exploratory surgery to determine where her internal bleeding was coming from, or to put her down. It was absolutely heartbreaking.

Emma handled this better than Alex or I did – honestly, Stella was our first “kid” – she did everything with us, showed her emotions like a human, and gave the best snuggles.

In the couple of weeks after Stella died, my depression really set in, even more than it had before – I was starting to have trouble getting out of bed in the morning, I took naps (I rarely take naps, except in the car!), I lost interest in most of my normal activities like cooking, running, playing with Emma ... I just wasn't functioning, and it was getting bad. My sister & sister-in-law each had a baby during this time, and I wasn't all that excited about it. At this point, I contacted my primary care physician and requested a medication – I had tried one in the fall, but the side effects were not good and I wasn't at a point that I wanted to “trial” a bunch of medications until I found the right one. Fortunately, this one seemed to be a match for me and within a few weeks I started to climb out of my hole. Soon I was able to start counseling – it was so frustrating to be on waiting lists for several weeks when I was feeling so awful, but I know those providers are busy and need to protect their own health/well-being too so can't just take on client after client ...

Fast forward to mid-April, when I ran the Boston Marathon. I had an AMAZING time – literally, I ran a 5-minute course PR; and emotionally, as I was smiling & laughing the entire time. We had great weather for the trip, and spent the day after the marathon in Boston to do some touristy/fun things that we don't usually do. This trip was so refreshing, and it happened at an opportune time.

Through the spring and summer, I began to feel more like myself. I was feeling joy again. I started dance parties when I was home alone washing dishes, just because. I laughed. I cried. I kept taking that medication religiously, despite some small side effects I was experiencing. I told myself that, at the time, the side effects were worth the main effect of improving my mood & ability to function and live my life. About halfway through the summer, Alex commented that he thought it was easier to get me to laugh – really laugh – than it had been a few months prior, and that was a huge accomplishment, a way I knew I was on the right track beyond myself.

Toward the end of summer, I transitioned my counseling sessions to include Alex, and we started working together to be partners & parents, rather than simply co-existing in the same space and trading off responsibilities around the house & for Emma. We were able to discuss – in a safe space, with some guidance from our counselor – the things that were holding us back in feeling connected in our relationship, and things that we needed from the other person to feel good. We started communicating more effectively, leaving each other short notes of “affirmation”, and identifying shared goals for ourselves, our family & our home. Those sessions were immensely helpful, and I would definitely recommend that structure to other couples who are struggling in their relationship, or even if they just want to strengthen what they have.

Somewhere during the holiday season (I think around Thanksgiving?), Alex & I had our last official counseling session. We were feeling pretty good about ourselves individually and relationship-wise. Of course we knew the holidays would present new, unexpected challenges and stressors into our lives, but that's par for the course – and we knew going in this year that we had “better quality tools” to handle tough situations.

With all of this going on, I was still taking my medication but realizing that the side effects were becoming more prominent and intrusive to my life ... and maybe those side effects weren't worth it anymore. In talking this through with my physician, we decided to start tapering off the medication as a trial run; we agreed that if I felt I still needed a medication after some time away from this, we'd try something new. From my perspective, I had three significant changes since I had started the medication:

- the primary stressor (the “straw that broke the camel's back” so to speak) of the foster care situation was gone;
- I had been through several months of counseling and successfully “graduated”
- I was in a better space mentally, overall, and felt I could recognize if I was going downhill again and intervene more quickly.

It is now February, a year after this all came to a head. And what a year it has been. I have done a lot of journaling, reflection, mental training (both related to my general well-being, and sport-specific), deep breathing, yoga, running, and communicating.

- I won't say that Alex and I don't fight/argue, because that isn't true — but when we do have arguments, we are able to step away and come back when we can calmly talk through the issue and state our case without the intense in-the-moment emotions clouding the waters.
- I have been off the medication for about 2 months now, and have not felt a need to return to it — sometimes we just need a little “booster” (like what I do as a physical therapist for my injured runner clients!) to guide our bodies to figure it out ... and that's what I felt I needed then, and don't need anymore (at least right now).
- I have shifted my running toward a sense of enjoyment, and that has helped me to recognize the process versus the outcome as my main goal in training; my race times suffered last year as a result, but my pure enjoyment of the sport did not waver.
- I find joy in every day. Even on the really tough days, I know there is something worth celebrating. Right now I am dealing with a pretty significant injury, and am finding other ways to stay active, feel good about myself, and think about my future running plans — a year ago, this injury would have really defeated me, and I honestly don't know how I would have managed it.

...lifted.

Honestly, I feel ready to go wherever life takes me next. I feel like myself again, and I actually feel even more prepared to handle tough situations than I did before all of this. Taking medications and going to counseling are not signs of weakness, but they can help you when you're feeling weak — those things exist for a reason, and I think our world as a whole would be a much happier place if we invested the time & resources into the little things that can make a big difference.

I know many people feel reserved about sharing their emotions, their struggles, or how they've coped — and that is fine. I am not afraid to share my story, and I hope that if you, or someone you know & love, is in a similar position as I was a year ago, that they would find someone to share their story with and help them sift through it and piece it all back together. I also hope that you feel you

can come talk to me — like I said in the beginning, I'm here — whether that is to lend an ear to listen, a shoulder to cry on, a pair of sneakers to run in, a cookie to snack on by the fire, a voice to advocate for you ... I'm here. I truly mean that. I have a lot of people in my corner, and they have made all the difference in my recovery — I wish that for you, too.

So, what's next??? Well, there's the EFA Retreat happening in June ... my new "Team Teen" program/club for teenage female athletes, starting with the Body Confident Athlete program ... some collaborative community- and clinician-focused educational workshops ... advocating for physical therapists & our patients at NY Lobby Day and the national House of Delegates assembly ... the Boston Marathon (hopefully!) ... coaching at New Balance Nationals at THE Track at New Balance in Boston (it's brand new this year — and we have more kids than ever who qualified for Nationals!) ... sending Emma to kindergarten in the fall (!!) ... starting some major home renovations ... supporting Alex through his return to running/training and racing ... SO MUCH GOOD STUFF, and a lot of challenges to go with it :)

I am here. I am with you. I am thankful for you.

With love (on this super sunny Valentine's Day!),

Dr. Coach Megan