Responsibility

The Queen of Victims: A Fairy Tale

Once upon a time, I was the Queen of Victims, with a shiny scepter, a sparkling crown, and a plush velvet robe, walking up and down the runway of Poor Me. Life didn't work for me. My boss was a jerk. My parents didn't encourage me. My husband was controlling. I got divorced. I complained and whined.

One day, a good and smart friend put a stunningly quick stop to it by asking me a revealing question that stung me like a slap in the face.

"Have you ever noticed that all the bad things you complain about happened when you were in the room? Have you ever considered that you might have something to do with your own rotten luck?"

I hadn't.

This so-called friend must have lost her mind. "What kind of friend are you, anyway?" I pouted.

Honestly, it never occurred to me that I might be inviting sadness, heartache, confusion, and struggles with the way I was behaving: irresponsibly. Every time I hit a rough patch, I had someone to blame: my boss, my parents, my ex-husband, my fair-weather friends, my hairdresser, my dog.

My good and smart friend's point was this: Bad things were happening to me because of my own actions, my own behavior, and my own pitiful Poor Me thinking, but I was crying so hard I couldn't see it through my tears. I had so many excuses about why my life was a mess, and so many people to blame.

After all, I *did* have an unhappy childhood; that couldn't be my fault. My boss *was* always yelling at me for something I supposedly did wrong—a clear sign that *he* needed a personality transplant. There's nothing I could do about *him*.

So at first, I thought my friend was nuts, or worse—I thought she was mean. Maybe she was jealous of me or had it in for me for some reason—with my luck, it wouldn't surprise me.

So I tried to prove to myself that what she said wasn't true.

I couldn't possibly be perpetuating my own failures. It was my boss's fault, my parents', my ex-husband's, not mine.

I clung to my status as Victim. *Queen* of Victims. *Proud* Queen. Right, not wrong. Always right, but never happy. Poor me.

Eventually, though, I could no longer deny that my friend was right, not jealous (why would she be jealous of someone whose life was a train wreck waiting to happen?), even though it hurt my feelings to hear her question and stung my pride to admit it was true.

When the wisdom of her comment finally sunk in, my life slowly started to change. I realized that more of what "happened"

to me was due to my own choices than I was claiming or even willing to admit. Much more.

All of it.

I realized that I needed to *own* those choices, *own* my actions, and *own* the results of those choices and actions.

I needed to stop being a victim, turn in my crown and scepter, and understand that bad things don't just happen on their own; rather, they're the result of poor choices and thoughtless actions.

I had to realize that consequences flow from my own choices, actions, and behaviors. I needed to take control of myself, to be the leader of my own life.

I needed to realize that I wasn't my parents' or boss's or ex-husband's victim. I was my own. I needed to stop victimizing myself.

In short, I needed to be responsible for my life by being responsible for my choices and my actions—and the consequences that flowed from them.

I'll admit it was a little embarrassing to confess to my friend and even to myself—and eventually to everyone—that I had been sabotaging my own success and happiness, all the while blaming it on others so nobody (including me) would know what I was doing.

I was like those promising young marathoners who suffer one injury after another from overtraining and never win their races—but they have a built-in excuse for their failure: "It's not my fault."

I never accepted responsibility for my failures because I always had someone or something else to blame, and my excuses sounded legitimate (at least to me). I could say it wasn't my fault, and that excused me from being responsible for those failures. Or so I thought.

That smart friend of mine is a truly good friend. She told me what I needed to hear: that I'm in charge of this life of mine.

That means standing up and being responsible for my failures as well as for my successes—and, in fact, doing that *before* I know whether my choices and actions will result in success or failure.

It's easy to claim responsibility when things go well, but it's hard when they don't. A truly responsible person is responsible either way.

The most amazing part is this: The more I am responsible for my actions and choices, the fewer failures I suffer, and the more successes I enjoy. The more I am responsible for my own actions and choices, the better I enjoy the life I lead, going full-throttle or cruising or stopping short—whatever I decide.

I don't go a day without saying out loud: "I own this."

I'm responsible for my choices, my actions, and their consequences. It makes every day so much smoother, so much more directed, so much more likely to end without massive stress or upset.

Now I'm going to pass my friend's good deed along to you. I'm going to tell you what you need to hear: that it's time for you to be responsible and accountable for everything you do, even if it turns out that you did the wrong thing.

What are you blaming on others: rotten luck, lousy job, money problems, spoiled kids, failed marriage?

Were you in the room when any of those problems started?

Admit it: You are responsible for everything in your life. The choices you have made have resulted in these outcomes.

Own it: Every choice, every behavior, every action you take is yours. They're nobody else's fault.

Do it: Commit to accountability. Watch it rock your world.