

Episode 33: Prioritize your emotional wellbeing during life's tough times

MERYL: Hey, everybody. Welcome back to The Rebel Nutritionist Podcast today. I am humbled and honored to have Denise Albert on as our guest. She is a founder, journalist, cancer, survivor and advocate. And as I had just said to her, we could probably do an intro about five minutes long because she's done so much more and I am really.

Like I said, humbled, excited, thrilled to have you on today. Denise. Welcome.

DENISE: Oh, thank you so much. And I feel the same way about you. It's wonderful to be here and I just have really enjoyed learning about you and your journey and your experience and what you've created. So thank you so much.

MERYL: Awesome.

Well, thank you. so let's dive right in because we have a lot to talk about and I'm sure this will take an organic turn in whichever direction it goes, I want to hear how you've used your story and your journey as a cancer survivor to help inspire others, to help others.

Like, what is your impetus was to create some of the work that you've done to support women.

Denise's cancer journey

DENISE: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was 41. And at the time I had a national radio show and I was also the founder of a company called The Moms, which was really and, is all about Parenting and speaking authentically and sharing different things that could potentially be wisdom for others or sharing different tips and thoughts on parenting.

And I wrote a lot about it. And so I felt like if I was going in to do. A radio show and talking about life as a parent. If I was now going through cancer, how can I not share that as well? Because I always try to be authentic. And even a few years before that I went through a divorce and I decided to write a series for the Huffington Post that was all about trying to have an amicable divorce.

And so I'm a journalist at my core. I was a senior producer at Good Morning America, and I worked in television as a journalist for many years. And so when I shifted and started my own business which was about parenting, I felt like now once I was going through cancer, how could I not share that as well?

So it was very easy for me to make that decision because that's sort of just at the core of who I am and what I do. And So I started to share it and actually something really magical happened because of my sharing whether it was on my radio show or I wrote a piece for people.com about my cancer diagnosis.

And then I continue to do an ongoing journey online with another magazine. And then I shared on social media and I always tried to be very authentic, but also. Not negative. You know, I try

to look for the positives, right. Because if you're going through something so traumatic as cancer diagnosis and journey and chemo and surgery and radiation, and that's not positive in itself.

So **I tried to look for the positives**, especially I had two young boys. And so I was always trying to share authentically, but be positive. when I could, and so. From that, I started to hear from people all over the country. So it's very kind of you to say it was inspiring and things like that. But for me, **what was inspiring was hearing from other people.**

And so it really created this really needed community that I was longing for. I was really scared and again, tried to be positive, but still, it's a very scary diagnosis. Anytime. As you know, you are diagnosed with cancer, and as a divorced mom and somebody trying to be present in my children's lives and be there for them even while I was really sick.

So thank you for saying that. What was inspiring for me was really hearing from other people and hearing their stories and them sharing their wisdom with me. They're little tips to get through things or hacks as everyone calls them now. So it just felt very natural for me to share my story and then it really was rewarding in so many ways.

MERYL: and that's fabulous because I do think we hear that a lot. I mean, I too, right. I'm a cancer survivor and you do gain strength from other people's energy from their wisdom. But what were some of the things that you shared that you either gained from other people or part of your message to inspire other people?

is there a couple of points that you kind of have tucked away in your head there?

How Denise handled THAT famous incident with the TSA

DENISE: Yeah. Well you know, I, I had a couple of things that I shared, which was, I mean, first of all, was the diagnosis. And as I was 41, I was divorced. I was in another relationship, which wasn't good. And I just shared everything.

I had **some complications with my treatment which led to rashes all over my body**, which led to a viral video when I was traveling and I had **an incident with the TSA** and knew I didn't do anything wrong because it was my first trip, post-chemo that I was allowed to get on a plane.

And so I had done the research on exactly. I was wearing a wig. I was worried that the wig would set off the x-ray machine. I also had **metal in my body because I had a port**. I also was carrying lotions because I had all of these allergic reactions. And so I had done all the research on how to travel, as a person and going with all of these aliens.

Basically. So I had put my creams in a bag. I had given them to the agent. I told them exactly what it was. I even had a card on me that showed that I had metal in my body. And so, I knew I did everything right. And I encountered an agent who maybe it was having a bad day or was trying to show her power and really didn't react well to me and was really awful to me. And so I actually took a video of their treatment of me and posted it on social media and it went viral and the TSA reached out to me and my point wasn't like, look at me, look at what happened to me. My point was. Wow. **I really hope this doesn't happen to anybody else because I am a strong person, but it felt aggressive and abusive and awful, and nobody should have to go through that.**

And so my whole message in sharing, it was exactly that like this better, never happen again. And so the TSA reached out to me and then were very apologetic and asked if I would **volunteer my time to shoot a public service announcement with them**, which was exactly what I wanted to do because I wanted to make sure that people who are traveling with medical ailments like I knew what to do, even though I had done the research and they also used it to retrain their agents.

there have been incidences since then. Not unlike that. But you know, I think that's life, right? So I'm hopeful that sharing my journey potentially stopped it from happening for a while. And there's always going to be mishaps, but I feel really good about what I was able to do.

MERYL: Yeah, and that I did watch the video and it was quite disheartening watching that, but again it was very inspiring to see that you took something that was a negative and how you could turn it around and educate and, **give others a strategy** for, okay. Here's what I may be up against.

And **here's how I can be prepared** and, and right. And having sympathetic workers. I just you know, some sympathy and understanding to the person that's walking through the security checkpoint, but we're not all just the same. and to have a little sympathy for someone that needs a little bit more of it, perhaps.

So yeah, the humanity in that. So thank you for sharing that.

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I did also watch your piece on Oprah. And you talked about being in the pandemic or during the pandemic, you were in a house full of people, but you still felt lonely. And I think so many people can relate to that, right? Especially women who have been in homes with their children and their spouses and You know, stuck and not able to do the routine things.

Look, I mean, the kids are stuck too, and we all had to learn how to turn and pivot on that one. But what for you? And you said well, getting through the loneliness, what helped you? what's the message there that you want to share.

The loneliness of the pandemic

DENISE: Wine. No, I'm just kidding. Um, So that was a really interesting time I think we all had different journeys during the pandemic mine, as someone who lives in New York City to make a long story short I'm divorced, my ex-husband is remarried and she also has an ex-husband.

She and her ex-husband have two children. Me and my ex-husband have two children and we all decided after a lot of conversations and deliberations, and negotiations to **leave New York City together and rent a house in Vermont**. And then, and then actually we decided to do it again in Maine. Once the Vermont house was, was up, and for people who know us it's like crazy. Okay. It's not like, oh, wow. They've all always been friends. No, not the case. And so the fact that we all did live in a house together is truly mindblowing. But **we all decided that this was the best decision to keep all of us healthy and safe and to give the kids a little bit of a better life** because New York City was the epicenter of the pandemic and shutting down.

So **I looked at it as like an adventure**. I was the last one to get on board, even though I'm always the one that is the most adventurous and really wanted friendliness among all of us.

But was met with some resistance at different points in our lives. So the fact that I was the last one to get on board was probably shocking to everybody, but I agreed to do it.

And I said to them, okay, well, I'm going to agree to do this. If I can write about it because this is truly amazing that we are all coming together for the kids at a really crazy time in the world.

And. You know, so we packed the bat we packed our bags and we thought, oh, maybe this will last two weeks.

We stayed together for six months. Okay. And I looked at it as an adventure at the beginning and as **a really incredible gift to my children** because I knew that it would be okay because you are all. Want the best for the children. And so sort of looked at it as an adventure and it was the first few days and weeks where were really interesting in this house.

First of all, I haven't lived in a house since I was a child. I live in New York City apartment. So even living in a house and making dinner and it the big kitchen was an adventure for me. And we sort of got into this really cool routine where we would all switch off making dinner. So like two or three of us and switch off and each person would have a night that they were in charge of.

And then we all sat down to dinner every night together, which was again as a divorced mom and I have two boys. To have You know, a group of eight. To sit down to dinner with it's pretty interesting and cool. But then it's like, we all got into our routines and at the end of the day, it's not people that I would choose to be in a house with.

Not all of them, at least. Right. And so it was beautiful in a lot of ways, but in a lot of ways, it **was very isolating and depressing** because as everyone else across the country experienced,

also, we didn't leave the house. Right. We were you know, even our groceries, we called the local store and two of us would go in the car and they would put the groceries in the trunk and then we would leave them in a garage for days, you know?

So I think we were in this house for two or three weeks before any of us even left to go to the grocery store in just the car, it was very isolating and I'm a people person and every day, I like to meet different people. I like to date, I like to meet a different friend for a coffee or a drink, or my work is very busy and every day is different and meeting different people and trying to do different things.

And here I was in the same house with the same people. For two and a half months. And again, as somebody who's also been through a cancer journey and just been through so much in life, the thought of not being able to connect with other people. And it doesn't even have to be people I know, but just like, I'm the kind of person I go to a new place and I've traveled alone before.

And I love to do that to go to a new place and not even be able to say hi to a person in a coffee shop is very traumatic for me. And so even though. I was now living with so many people. Again, it's not the people that I would choose to live with my ex-husband and his wife. And even though it was nice to get time with them and to get to know her and to certainly get to know her ex-husband and her children who I consider family now it was very lonely.

And **I think saying that was very freeing** because I didn't do it. To hurt them and it wasn't a knock on them. Right. It's just, it's a real feeling. And as you said we were on Oprah and it was because of that article that I wrote because it got into her hands somehow. And I think that really resonated with her.

I think at the time she might've been living in a house with Gale and I think. That resonated also because it's this, this crazy time in the world where everyone is unsure and unclear of what life looks like and what life can be. And it felt, I said it, it felt lonely. So I say what I feel and that's just who I try to be and it's who I am.

And if it helps other people, then, then it helps me.

MERYL: Right.

the authenticity of that it's comforting for a lot of people just because I think. So many people feel like, I just feel like this. Right. So **it validates what everybody else is also probably thinking and feeling.**

And so what did you, I mean, other than the wine, were there strategies that you used or implemented or anything like that? That helped you get through that, right? I like you. I am very social. I was fortunate enough to come into my office you know when we were all shut down, I came into the office.

It sort of made me feel, even though I was by myself I was alone here at least it made me feel like I was in somewhat of my typical routine. Right. But yeah, I mean, it wasn't talking to anybody and I also am very social, and look, humans are social creatures. Right. I always say what happens to a dolphin when you put it in a tank?

Well, by itself, right? It dies. Well. Yeah. So we're mammals at heart. I mean, and we need that interaction. We need socialization, I certainly have seen it since the pandemic in our practice. The levels of anxiety, not just with women our age, but with the younger kids. I mean the

amount of anxiety that we have seen as a result of what the shutdowns and the whole pandemic have created is just mind-boggling to me.

But. Yeah. Going back to you, what were some of the strategies that you perhaps use that could help others? You know?

Strategies to cope with the loneliness and anxiety

DENISE: Yeah. Thank you. Well, **I tried to work out every day** and I did it actually with my ex-husband's wife every day, we set a schedule and we did you know, online zoom classes together and I'm a fan of staying active and being outside and working out.

So that was really helpful. I tried to get my **—kids to go on hikes with me**. They really didn't want to do that, but I tried to get outside every day. And what I did is I would go out for a. Just around our, where we were saying, which was like in the country. And so for me to not see people was so strange when I had wifi and service, **I would call friends and do FaceTime so that I felt connected to people**.

And I did a lot with my kids step-sisters so my ex's wife's kids, because we hadn't really known each other before. So I really used that as an opportunity to get to know these girls who my boys love. **even though I was lonely, I really tried to look at the positives and Really work on relationships that would be lifelong and meaningful**.

And then **at night I tried to do virtual dates** that I tried to keep my life going. And, some of the kids would try to come on the dates with me, which was fun. So we definitely had a lot of fun. Also, even though I was definitely lonely. You know, and I continue that, especially as you

mentioned with **so much anxiety still today**, and I still feel it also I've been home for a year now, but life is different.

Work is different. And it's just been really challenging. So, and then **I broke my back** and so, which is a whole other story. So I haven't been able to do the things that make me feel good, which is socialize and be active and stay in shape. And so. I'm just getting back to a point where I can start that again.

So I feel like my life has been just so the last few years, first divorce cancer pandemic broken back. So I think this is going to be my year. And so, it's been definitely filled with anxiety especially with my last injury. But you know, I'm excited to learn more about you and how that can help my life.

But I try to, even with my broken back, I tried to get outside and walk every day. I just think **there's nothing better than fresh air and moving your body** and in any way that you possibly can. And that has been really helpful for me. And I'm just trying to get back out and meet as many people.

And like **I'm saying yes to everything**. I was introduced to you. Yes, I'll do it. I am going to a women's networking event tonight, you know? I'm just saying yes, I'm saying yes because I want to meet new people. I want to build a bigger network.

I find people interesting. And I think the more I have on my calendar, the better. Because I really need to live my life. And I've always been a person who loves to celebrate every day and live every day and meet new people and try new things. But I think now more than ever, and that

actually helps me **with anxiety because the more I have on my calendar, the more that I can do** the more I do. Right. And the better I feel.

MERYL: And that's great and I'm very similar to you and like that I, I do like to meet people. I do like the interaction I feed off of other people's needs. Yeah. As long as it's positive energy, not toxic energy, but I think you attract people, of like-mindedness.

Why your emotional health is an important part of your overall wellbeing

I'm always intrigued by the people that I meet and the people that I get to talk to and network with. And, you know, I think the bottom line is, is that oftentimes, and I get this a lot too. People think, oh, well you, seem to have it all right. that **facade of the appearance** of what people think, You know, we all have stuff that we deal with. I always say, do not judge because you just never know what someone is going through and you're a perfect case in point.

I think it's inspiring for other people to hear that **there is no perfect and that working on yourself is always a process.**

No matter what it looks like, whether it's **your emotional health and wellbeing, your physical health.** Right. All of it. And that's the work that we do here. That is so important to me. It's really about. Looking under the hood because the facade is just a facade. It's what we want people to see.

But at the end of the day, the meat of it all is underneath the surface.

DENISE: That's exactly right.

MERYL: And I want people to know that **it's okay to feel vulnerable**. I remember when I was younger, it was, oh, we had to be superwomen. We had to be able to do it all right.

Be the mom, be the career person, be the whatever. And It's like a house of cards. It crumbles you can't, you can't possibly do it all. And so I, I feel like if nothing else, **the pandemic has taught us that it still takes a village**. We all still need each other to support each other. And you're like that.

Perfect. case in point on that. I think all of the women who listened to you and get to see you appreciate that vulnerability and the authenticity because it's important that I think we all needed to be able to, as I always say straighten the crown instead of knock the crown down.

DENISE: I love that. And you know, what also, about people

MERYL: the crown instead of knock the crown down.

DENISE: I love that. And you know, what also about, about people, doing it All? I always say.

Everyone's all is different, right? So I don't even know what that means, right? you might be doing everything that, you want to be doing that works for you. And mine is so different. I might not want to be doing everything that you're doing.

So I think it's, that's a funny kind of statement to me anyway.

MERYL: that's so true. And I feel like it's almost like bringing it back into what I always call that diet culture mentality of people, oh, I have to be on the perfect diet, or either I'm on a diet or off a diet. I'm like, there's no such thing **you need to eat for your health and your wellness and your longevity** and you're nourishing your body in some way or you're not right. It's not I'm on or off. I'm good or bad. And look, that could be a whole other conversation, but I, do want to be mindful of your time because I know you have other things to get to today.

DENISE: Oh, you're so sweet. I love talking to you.

MERYL: Well, this has been awesome. Like I said, I think you and I could go on and on.

Good. Any last comments? Anything you want to say before we sign off

DENISE: thank you for having me and thinking of me and I hope this perhaps helps others. And I would love to hear from everyone because I just think that we can all help and support each other.

MERYL: Absolutely. And that, that is a great way to end this podcast.

So with that again, thank you so much for being on this podcast. Hopefully, it will not be the last time we hear from you.

DENISE: No, it won't be, oh, I'm going to be calling you immediately.

MERYL Great. Well, I look forward to that as well. I really look forward to helping you on and continuing this journey. So with that, everyone yes.

Send us your feedback, send us any comments. We would both love to hear what you all have to say and make it a great day. This is your Rebel Nutritionist signing off.