

# Run with It!

## Redefining the comfort zone

**By Lynn Grodzki**

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I'm in Andrew's car on a bright spring morning, on the way to the basketball court. "This is a good song for you to listen to, to get pumped for b-ball," he says and turns up the car radio, loud. It's a rap song and the chorus is, "Big things poppin', lil' things stoppin'." Andrew explains that poppin' means making things happen. I nod my head to the song's hypnotic beat and decide I'll try my best to make something happen on the basketball court.

Standing on the half-court line in the hot sun, I bounce the basketball and crow, "I'm so poppin! I'm popcorn, maybe even a pop-tart!" Andrew rolls his eyes, smiling. Twenty-one years old, agile, cool, and a fearless athlete, he never has any trouble stopping me on the court.

I spin away to try my version of a mini fast break. A fast break is when a player with the ball (me) attempts to move up the court and into scoring position as quickly as possible so that the defense doesn't have time to set up. I turn, do a fake, and run up court, but Andrew has seen this coming and easily bats the ball away from me as I give up another point to him. Fast breaks are hard to achieve.

Last year, I got hit by a really devastating fast break--breast cancer. I didn't see the cancer coming and had no chance to defend against it. I was diagnosed in late December and on Valentine's Day gave up both breasts to be cancer free--a love letter of sorts to myself. Fast breaks usually leave the other team confused, wondering what the hell just happened here. After the surgery, I felt exactly like that.

A big part of my confusion was the lack of warning. My annual mammogram showed visible clusters of tiny white specs, most likely cancer growing in situ. But where was the warning from my own intuition? I had no dreams with cancer symbolism, no inklings alerting me that something was amiss. As one who prided herself on a refined sense of mind-body intuition, I felt blindsided. My intuition had been my fallback position for decades. I relied on it as a single, working parent to know, in my gut, if my son, a latch-key child, had made it home from school and was safely inside the house. My intuition had been my guide when I left safe employment in the lucrative family business to pursue a riskier career in social work. I used my intuition to determine which house to purchase, how to end a bad marriage, and, later, how to find a much better one.

Once I became a psychotherapist, I refined my intuition by attending workshops on hypnosis, Neuro-Linguistic Programming, body psychotherapy, and energy therapy. Checking in with my sixth sense was, for me, primarily a mental exercise--one that I used daily until it became routine. I'd listen to my body as though it were a radio, with my mind twisting the dial, seeking a perceptible station. By filtering out the "white noise" of random thoughts and trying to lock onto an energetic signal, I could tune in to a body-based sense of knowing. I regularly tuned in during the day with a personal question or concern. I could

also tune in during a therapeutic conversation with a client, which seemed to increase my ability to be more empathic and clear in my interpretations.

Throughout the months between the mammogram, multiple biopsies, diagnosis, and the actual surgery, when I had so many decisions to make about treatment, I set aside time each day to tune in and get information about my prognosis. I focused and asked my body: "Is it really cancer? Has it spread? Do I need surgery? How can I stay healthy? Talk to me!" I listened for answers or clues, but heard little coming back. Once in a while, a deep, subtle voice inside said: "Don't worry, it's nothing." But this was the wrong answer, as test after test confirmed. My intuition, so reliable for so long, was suddenly no longer trustworthy.

After surgery, when it was all over except for living with my new (flatter) body image, I felt betrayed. Where was my valued mind-body connection when I'd needed it? How could I trust my intuitive sense ever again? I wondered if I'd been asking my body the wrong questions in the wrong way, or if I wasn't listening correctly. I finally stopped obsessing and just accepted my lack of a reliable intuitive connection, at least when it came to using it for myself. On a more immediate level, I had another mind-body problem. My surgeon had cleared me for daily exercise and I knew I needed to follow her advice, but I couldn't get moving. My mind wanted to, but my body wouldn't get on board.

One day, I saw Andrew, who lives across the street from me. He was outside on his front lawn playing with his dog, a fetching basset hound. I went over to pet the dog, and we chatted. He mentioned that he teaches basketball classes to young children. I asked if he could help me get into better shape and he eagerly agreed to be my personal trainer.

Andrew is a natural coach, demanding and encouraging at the same time. We started spending two, then three, sometimes four hours a week together, training. This is more contact than I have with anyone else in my life, except my husband. We've developed a kind of odd intimacy, speaking of little but exercise and basketball. When he asks each morning, "How are you?" he doesn't want to know the details of my life. He wants to know how my 56-year-old body feels: whether it's strong and ready for our workout. He sees me at my worst--red faced, gasping for breath, grunting to complete one more sit-up--yet this is what pleases him, helping my body test its limits. "Yes, Lynn, I'm proud of you, don't stop, give me 10 more!" he urges me on. By training me so intensely, he knows me in ways I barely know myself. Over nine months, I get stronger physically, more confident, stop almost all my complaining, and just try hard to do what he asks, even when it feels impossible to me.

This spring morning, I have one of those impossible moments. Our hour workout is almost over, and despite my initial desire to be poppin', I'm now just tired. Andrew looks at his watch and says casually, "We have five minutes left. You know what that means."

I'm hot, sweaty, and so done with this workout! I know what he wants: he wants me to run the quarter-mile path around the field next to the court at top speed. I really, really don't want to do this. Andrew puts his arm around my shoulder. "Lynn, I feel your pain. I do. I know exactly what I'm asking you to do. I know it's hard. But this is your mind saying no. Your mind is scared to run right now. What does your body say?"

That's a good question. I'm not sure how I'll know the answer. I'm pretty sure I can't use my old intuitive method to tune in to my body, since it's no longer reliable. Instead, I just sit. I'm blank. As the seconds go by, I begin to feel a subtle body relaxation. My body isn't

in pain. It's fine with the idea of running. "My body says it wants to run," I answer. I'm astounded to be saying this. Andrew nods and says, "Go!"

I stand up, take a breath, and begin to run. I'm not running fast and I'm breathing hard, but if I listen to my body, it isn't in pain, it isn't unhappy--it's just moving. I try to let my body do what it wants and have my mind just be a passenger along for the ride. This isn't easy, because my mind wants to do its old thing, to be in control, but as soon as that happens and my mind, prying, asks my body, "Is this wise?" my body immediately weakens. So I try to just stay in the moment, breathe, and focus on nothing but making my body move through space. I run. As I run, I realize that this is a new way for my mind to be with my body: to be the passenger. My body is in charge--it's running me, instead of the other way around. My knees go up and down, my hands pump, I pant, I'm moving forward, my body is contented. I see Andrew in the distance waving his hands, urging me on. I ignore him and focus on nothing. I'm running and my body is in charge.