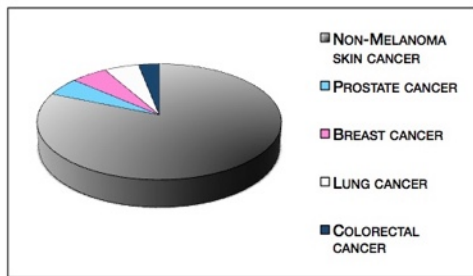


## SUMMER, SKIN CANCER, AND SELF-CARE

July was UV awareness month and though summer vacations and school breaks are quickly drawing to a close, those of us in this Valley of the Sun average 211 days of sunshine a year. Sun safety is always something that we in particular need to be aware of. Let's start off by reviewing some sobering facts: more than 3.5 million cases of non-melanoma skin cancer were diagnosed this year, and if we add melanoma cancer of the skin we are adding nearly another 75,000 cases per year; these numbers beat out prostate (220,800), breast (234,190), lung (221,200), and colorectal cancers (132,700), and is more than all of them combined (SEER Cancer Statistics Factsheets: Melanoma of the Skin. National Cancer Institute, see <http://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/melan.html>).



The good news about this particular type of cancer is that a majority of cases are easily avoidable by taking care of yourself carefully limiting sun exposure, understanding your risk levels, and when outside, applying sunscreen properly. Equally important as taking care of ourselves while enjoying our sunny skies is getting annual skin checks by a qualified doctor. When caught early, skin damage, including skin cancer, is highly treatable.

continued on page 3



## Shame Scripts: Moving to Vulnerability and Esteem

A "sickness of the soul", that's what Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael called shame. Brene Brown called it "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging".

Monica Lewinsky refers to it as "humiliation". But however we define it or describe it or experience it, one thing is sure and that's that we all experience it, often to toxic levels, and some more frequently than others. In this discussion I'm meaning the toxic form of shame, not the healthier form that prompts our conscience and keeps us from doing things we oughtn't to be doing. But the toxic that says "I am a miserable human being", "I am awful", "My mere personhood is flawed". Ouch!!

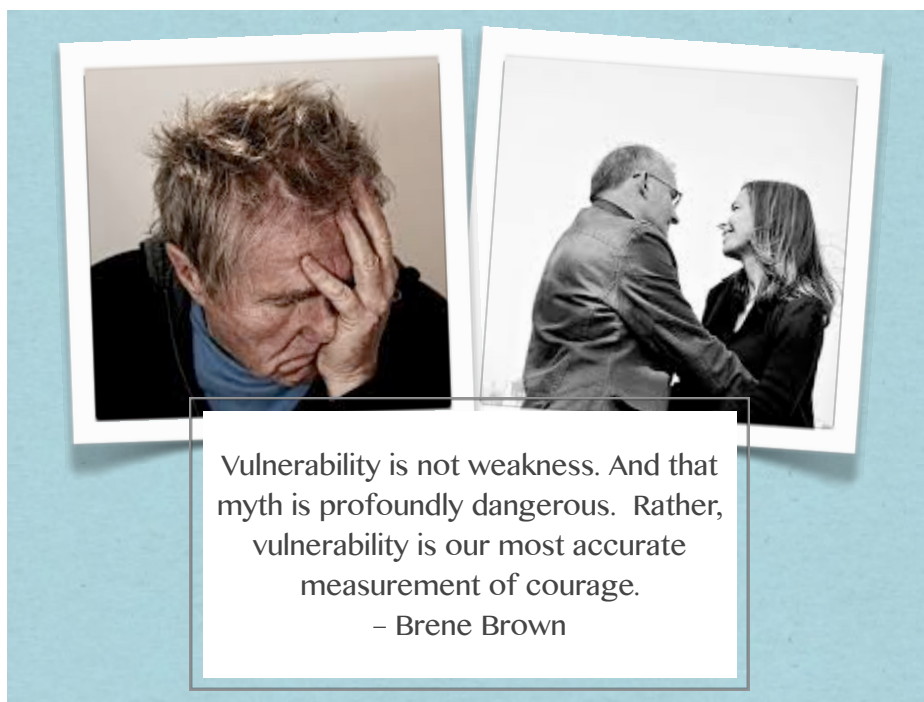
There are varying theories about shame, but I want to share some about shame scripts that we have running silently (but at a level we can emotionally feel them) that impact our reactions, our feelings, our daily lives. And if we are facing a cancer such as skin cancer, they

can then be triggered strongly as we face the battle of the unknown, the treatment, and the results of it. Essentially script theory suggests that the experiences that we had when younger can write a message of shame on our hearts and beings. I still remember the time I failed the Red Rover team I was on by not breaking through the chain and the other team won on their next try. And, as I was a chubby child, it was made worse by the bullying words that said, "You're big enough, aren't you???" So the shame script for me was born. I was not just a failure, but I was a huge failure as a person. It wasn't about my lack of skill, it was about me. And so, as shame scripts do go, when I thought I might make a mistake with my body, then I was a failure as a person. Trip walking? Failure. Not win the race? Failure. Be seen running? Dreadfully shameful to be seen. And when I considered myself in relationship with others on a team? Undeserving of them and less than. All of those shameful messages became the background script that began to run all of the time.



Now, one incident will not cause the constancy of the running audiotope in my head, but if repeated enough in sufficiently different ways, then it will. And this can be from our peers, by the media and advertising, by teachers, by parents, and then by ourselves to ourselves as adults.

This not only impacts me, or you, but it also has a strong impact on others around us. Thus, if I am telling myself that I am a dreadful failure, all it takes is one person to not like something I've done and I may react in anger, when what I'm really feeling is shame. The causes of shame are varied—in some cases it may be appearance based; if I'm telling myself I'm ugly, then can you imagine what the script does to me when the doctor says, "there won't be much of a scar". For some, they'd rather not have the surgery than face that scar as it means they will be repulsive. Or, others may have scripts that they weren't "enough" that set in at childhood, now manifesting as trying to prove oneself as more of a "man". If this is the case then having to file bankruptcy, suffer a job loss, feel the sting of a partner who's cheated are all even more extreme failures as a person. All of those issues may trigger the childhood memories of not being "enough". Women have their own set of issues, some may begin during menopause. A woman finds physical changes occurring and is having difficulty with responsiveness sexually. When the scripts can take over she may feel depressed and feeling so awful about herself she begins to withdraw. If a woman can overcome the script that says, "You must be responsive or you're a bad person/wife/partner"; and instead respond, "I am more than my face/lack of breast/slow response", then she can begin to change that script. Thus it's changing what we choose to listen to – the lie of the past that is bringing on the shame, or the truth



as it is today and as we can choose to believe.

Monica Lewinsky in a TED talk (you can hear her at [http://www.ted.com/talks/monica\\_lewinsky\\_the\\_price\\_of\\_shame?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/monica_lewinsky_the_price_of_shame?language=en)) quoted Brene Brown in saying "Shame cannot survive empathy". This means, if we expose our shame, our feelings and thoughts about it to another safe person, it will begin to dissipate. Thus, when I feel criticized, if I can stop myself, breathe, and then respond to my friend who shows me how to paint differently than I am so that I can "go more quickly" or "have smoother strokes", I may pull off a less defensive response. Rather than saying, "I like to do it THIS way!" I can say, "I felt shame and like I wasn't good enough when you showed me how to change my painting. I know you're just offering a suggestion, but it's hard for me to believe you aren't also saying I'm inadequate". My shame will reduce, I'll find the punch in the stomach feeling begins to recede, and my friend can clarify, "It's just from a class I took recently I found that technique. I love you and you're fine." And, in the case of

cancer, I can look at the small scar, or the major one, or my lack of response and share with my partner, "I don't want to have sex anymore because I feel so ashamed of my body; I feel repulsive, I don't respond the same way anymore". This allows an appreciation for what I'm feeling, and we can move forward together rather than my partner feeling isolated from me; and me feeling isolated and needing to hide. To respond like this is to change the script, and as Brene Brown says, to be vulnerable.

There is a fabulous 20 minute talk by Brene on vulnerability at [http://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability/transcript?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability/transcript?language=en). I encourage each one of us to watch it. And then to commit, as she does, to be real, to be seen, to stop and allow the feelings and share them, and learn, "I am enough". Hard to do. Painful to do as we face the shame. But what release and freedom sharing with our loved ones brings. And then we can more easily face and change those scripts. And face our fears of cancer, or aging, or whatever life has brought to you today.



# SUMMER, SKIN CANCER, AND SELF-AFFIRMATIONS, CONT.

*The wise don't fear the unknown...  
but don't let that stop them.  
With courage... They make the  
unknown known.  
~Jm w/revision by Dr. Beth*

For more information, please visit <http://www.cancer.org/research/infographicgallery/skin-cancer-prevention#RGU0223iDPDK35aC.97> for a great infographic that makes all of this data and more very easy to digest. For information specific to skin cancer and dealing with it go to <http://www.skincancer.org/>.

Those of us who have already experienced sun damage or skin cancers may have developed a sense of shame over the matter. Perhaps we are blaming ourselves, "I knew better", or feeling judged by others. I have been diagnosed with skin cancer on my face three times, and had many more biopsies than 3, and I know the fear of waiting for the results and whether it's a melanoma after the actual surgery; as well as the self-recrimination and shame when I recalled all of those years I avoided sun screen, much to my mom's dismay, and instead allowed myself to burn, "For the tan, mom!!" Maybe self-consciousness has taken hold about the physical appearance of certain areas of our bodies. When I was diagnosed with skin cancer and the doctor thought it was melanoma, and then had to have surgery on my face I was fortunate to have it removed AND discover it was not melanoma; I was also

thankful for the plastic surgeon who removed it. Why a plastic surgeon? The dermatologist's and my concern over the damage it would leave as it appeared it was quite deep. So the fear can be not only of the cancer, but also, how we will look.

Skin cancer elicits many emotions although they often surprise us and the people around us, after all, say some, "it's only skin cancer". And yet skin cancer brings with it its' own set of emotional and social side effects. There can be the shame of "why am I so upset, it's only skin cancer"; or for some the shame of how they appear after the cancer is removed or over how they got it. As we walk this road of sun and the damage it can do we often need to forgive ourselves. And this is a tricky area of forgiveness isn't it? It's often much easier to forgive someone else rather than ourselves. Let us try to challenge ourselves to treat our minds, hearts, and bodies with grace, just as we would do for our best friend or loved one. And speaking of that, asking our loved ones, our support network for that support can be very important.

We can try dialoguing with ourselves, giving the same advice and pep talk we would if a dear one came to us with insecurities. Would you say to your best friend, "well if you hadn't laid out in the sun at 20 with oil you wouldn't have this now!"? Or, would you instead affirm them and empathetically help them to know that we love them and are in it with them and that they are more than the scar? I know, a scar on the face can be difficult; but, we can use make-up and other things to cover it or we can even see the scar as a sign we conquered it. On the face??? Well, that's something that can be

stretching, but think of the individuals who have been burned, our soldiers coming back from war or the police and fire responders who are burned protecting us? Remember Jason Schechterle, the Phoenix police officer who was burned on over 50% of his body while on duty (see <http://beyondtheflames.com/index.php/about/>). He survived and has become a hero in Phoenix. Granted, his case is extreme, but sometimes we need those heroes to picture when we are facing shame and fear. By doing this we may be able to reframe what we see in the mirror, and what we may have perceived as a giant flaw may become our own symbol of courage and victory over a cancer. But, like any emotional change it is a process, as you have likely learned if you have spent any time in session with me. But your self affirmation can help your thoughts and beliefs change.

Know that for most of us we get in and out of each skin cancer check with another "clear" and just need to reschedule for 4, 6, or 12 months. So affirm today to make that appointment with a specialist and allow that full body skin check, even though it may be uncomfortable. Please do not let fear stop you from calling to schedule a doctor's appointment for this, or any other physical worry. It is very understandable to have fear of the unknown, most of us do. But, if you have not made an appointment to be checked out by your doctor, please remember, early diagnosis is key. Do not let something go that is causing you fear or angst, ask a trusted family member or friend to go along for moral support and see your doctor. Be wise: "make the unknown known" in this area of your health.

Remember that some medications, and some herbs, can make us more sun-sensitive and we may burn more quickly, i.e.: St. John's Wort, some antibiotics, some diabetic drugs, even some cardiac medications. Check with your pharmacist if you're going to be in the sun or, here in Phoenix, for any medication.

## Tips:

Foods that offer protection from the sun are: tomatoes, watermelon, green pepper, salmon, berries, turmeric, green tea, dark chocolate and pomegranates. See <http://www.thehealthminded.com/2015/05/what-to-eat-to-protect-your-skin-from-sun.html> for more info.

A high SPF & BROAD SPECTRUM sunscreen is your best protection against skin cancer and photoaging. When choosing your sunscreen, you need protection against BOTH UVA and UVB rays and the SPF rating indicates the protective value against sunburn. The takeaway: choose wisely, apply generously and often.



## Ginger-Hibiscus-and Minty Watermelon Popsicles

from [halfbakedharvest.com](http://halfbakedharvest.com)

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Ingredients for 8 popsicles:

- 3/4 cup water
- 2 tablespoons dried hibiscus flowers
- 1 inch fresh ginger, peeled + finely chopped or grated for more flavor
- 1/4 cup honey, add 1-2 tablespoons more for a sweeter pop
- 1/4 cup fresh mint (you can also use basil)
- 4-5 cups fresh watermelon
- the juice of 1 lemon

### Instructions:

Bring the water to a boil in a medium size pot. Remove from the heat and add the hibiscus flowers, ginger, honey and mint leaves. Cover and let steep for 20 minutes. Strain into a blender and discard the used hibiscus flowers, ginger and mint.

To the blender, add the watermelon and lemon juice. Blend until smooth. Strain the mixture through a fine mesh strainer/sieve or into a bowl lined with cheesecloth. Squeeze out all the juice and discard the watermelon pulp.

Pour the mixture among 8 popsicle molds. Place the molds in the freezer and freeze for 1 hour. Remove and insert popsicle sticks. Return to the freezer and freeze until firm, about 4 hours. To remove the popsicles run the mold under hot water for 10 seconds and then pull the popsicles out of the molds. Store in the freezer.

<http://www.halfbakedharvest.com/ginger-hibiscus-and-minty-watermelon-popsicles/>

## Books to read:

♦ *I Thought it was Just Me but it Wasn't* or any book by Brene Brown. Look for her new one, *Rising Strong* due out August 25<sup>th</sup>!

♦ *Healing the Shame that Binds You* by John Bradshaw

♦ *I Am Special* by Max Lucado



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