

In 2006 I was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent surgery. On the first night I returned home from hospital, I jotted down my reflections on how to navigate the way forward, now that my life had changed. I'm sharing it now, 14 years later as I feel it may resonate with you. It speaks to the reason why I do the work I do, because I know firsthand how life can change and how with support, it is possible to move on and chart a new course.

"When the rudder falls off"

.....the plan of attack (AKA plan B) when the direction I am sailing towards is hindered by the rudder sitting on the bottom of the ocean

Are you captain of your own ship, sailing resolutely toward your goal, enroute to the life you have mapped out for yourself, or are you drifting around in a "tinny", happy to go with the flow, changing the direction of the rudder as you become seduced by the lure of the siren song of the mermaids on the rocks?

As individuals, we each have a preferred style of navigating life. We position ourselves at the front of our ship, keeping a watchful eye to ensure that we don't run aground, tweaking the rudder every now and again to ensure smooth sailing toward our destiny.

But what happens when the rudder falls off? The very thing that enables us to direct our course and sail in the direction of our goals is sitting on the bottom of the ocean. The instant "OhMyGod!" reaction is to reach for the oxygen tank and dive overboard in search of the rudder so that you can retrieve it and continue on your plotted course, with nothing more than a minor time delay, and an extra dip in the ocean of life – a little wet (albeit "dryer behind the ears"), a more experienced swimmer.

But sometimes, you can't retrieve the rudder, all you can do is stare hopelessly as it fades from view, and becomes enveloped by the inky blackness engulfing the ocean floor. Whether you are in a 'tinny' or a steamer, your means of directing your ship along the map with your plotted course has now gone.

What to do?

Some people choose to sit and stare into the black hole at the point at which they last spotted the rudder for the longest time. Even though they may drift through life as the days and years move on, their heart is still focused on that one black spot, willing their rudder to float up to the surface, and their spirit lies with the rudder at the bottom of the ocean, becoming more corroded as the years pass.

Others may use the rudder as an anchor, with their quick reflexes hooking the end of a fishing line around the rudder as it disappears from view. Knowing that the line will never be strong enough to bear the weight of the rudder and enable the rudder to be retrieved, however secure in the knowledge that it will be strong enough to keep the boat from drifting too far with the current for a short time. Sometimes it is comforting to have that anchor, as when the rudder falls off, you may find that you are experiencing a sea of emotions accompanied by gale force winds and 7 metre swells. As you are buffeted about by the elements, at least you are not being blown too far off course. Once the storm subsides, and the sea has returned to its glassy smooth texture, it is time to revisit the map.



Is the direction you were sailing in and the destination you were charging full steam ahead toward where you really want to dock? If you were drifting around (somewhat aimlessly) in the tinny, has the loss of your rudder and survival of the storm made you realize that there are specific destinations you want to visit and treasures you want to discover?

You may decide now to change course, to take advantage of the time you have to scan the horizon for a better destination. You may refer back to your compass points and chart a new course – one that will provide treasures that astound, rewards beyond your wildest imaginings.

Check your vessel for seaworthiness. Assess her condition, and make sure that she has plenty of fuel and appropriate rest to give her the best chance of getting you to where you want to go.

Take stock of all that you have onboard. What treasures have you collected on your journeys to date, that can help plot your new course and navigate your way through seemingly treacherous seas toward your destination? You may discover items that are creating “drag” and decide to throw now unnecessary items overboard thereby making your vessel more buoyant.

Engage any passengers on board in the charting of the new course. Encourage them with your vision of the abundance and treasures that await. Beware – some may want to keep sailing to the old destination, and mutiny may occur. Some may have to walk the plank! Others may decide that they haven’t developed the sea-legs that may be required for the journey and decided to swim to shore. This is your destination – your passengers may be willing to assist you to get there and share in the treasures and rewards, or prefer to chart their own course.

Construct a makeshift rudder. It may be that for sometime you use your oar (or paddle) to navigate your way around the jagged rocks and assist you to change direction until you can dock at a port and acquire a new rudder. Whilst you are now traversing waters previously uncharted by yourself, others have gone before you – seek support from seafaring friends.

Reward yourself from the treasure chest with every step of the voyage. Remember to reward your passengers as well.

Keep your eye on the horizon, your mind on the rewards of your destination and the treasures you have collected whilst on the journey. The final destination is very rarely a single point on the map. Head toward a Bay of Islands, where you can cruise between the islands and achieve a harmonious balance.

Once there, take a deep breath in and feel the spray of the water on your face, the wind in your hair, the taste of salt on your lips, and the sun on your shoulders, and say “I made it”.