

# KATHY DEMPSEY



You might think being diagnosed with AIDS is the worst thing that could happen to anyone. Not necessarily. At least that's what Kathy Dempsey is likely to tell you. And she would know.

In 1986, the twenty-six year old nurse was working as an emergency room nurse in a Tennessee hospital. One night, an accident victim was wheeled in, bleeding and near death. The doctors and nurses did everything they could to save him. They treated his wounds, gave him mouth-to-mouth, and even massaged his heart. Unfortunately, the patient died. Only then did the staff discover he had AIDS.

Afterward, as dictated by hospital policy, everyone was tested. A tiny cut on Kathy's finger made her vulnerable to the infection, and she tested HIV positive. Hoping it was a false positive, she had multiple blood tests...and they all showed the same thing. "It was a death sentence," Kathy understood, and knew she was doomed.

As soon as the hospital found out, Kathy lost her job. Not only was she out of work, but she quickly began to be out of friends. At a time when she needed comfort the most, many of the people she thought cared about her were afraid to touch her. Many just stopped calling. Her entire future disappeared into disease-induced oblivion.

Within months of that fateful night in the ER, Kathy had no money, no hope, and no energy. As she spiraled downward in despair, her life became a living hell. She spent her days and nights in a swirl of fear, worry, and regret. It was awful to have AIDS but it was worse to have AIDS *and* be plagued by "I wish I had's" and "the if only I could..." or "why didn't I..." regrets. It was too much for the young woman and she thought about killing herself...*and almost did*.

Then something amazing happened. A routine blood test showed no sign of AIDS. No one could give her an explanation for the reversal. She was spared and, to this day, Kathy thinks it was a miracle.

Suddenly, Kathy had her life back. With that, she also had a future again. Now what would she do, she wondered

As Kathy thought about her life before AIDS, she realized she "had been walking around asleep." No more! AIDS turned out to be Kathy's "wake-up call" and, without death on her doorstep, she planned to be fully conscious as she put her life back together. Remembering all the terrible hours she lamented what she hadn't done, Kathy set a new intention for her life. She decided, "Now that I have my life back...I want to live with as few regrets as possible." She didn't know it at that moment, but her courageous choice would change the course of her personal history.

In the months that followed, Kathy returned to health care, first in psychiatric nursing and then in hospital administration. As she threw herself into long work days, she also started looking for something more. Someone told her to start journaling as a way to uncover her true purpose. Each night Kathy took some time to write down her feelings about the day's events.

One day, her boss came to her with an opportunity to teach a night course in stress management. She hesitated. She was already working long hours, and this would make her day longer. More importantly, she was looking for that *one thing* that was her passion, the thing that would fill her with purpose. Teaching a class on stress didn't seem to be it. However, Kathy didn't want to say "no" and then wonder "what if..." She reluctantly agreed.

Within a few weeks, Kathy started teaching the weekly class. She enjoyed doing the work and felt stimulated by the interaction. She believed she was really helping people and that energized her.

A few months later, as she reread her journal, she noticed how enthusiastically she wrote about teaching. As she read her daily chronicles, she noticed a sharp difference between teaching and everything else in her working life. She started questioning all her activities. She asked herself, "Do I want to do things that drain my energy (as her admin tasks did), or create the kind of energy her classes gave her?"

Kathy's choice was clear. She quickly put her life on a new course. It became Kathy's victory path.

Within days, Kathy excitedly told her trusted friend, JoAnn Alexander, about her plans. A hospital vice-president, JoAnn was in a position to help. She asked Kathy what she could do to support her and Kathy told her. Over the next few years, JoAnn arranged Kathy's work to include more speaking, which positioned Kathy to attend speaker workshops and even join the National Speakers Association as part of her job with the hospital.

Kathy hit a high point in 1998, when she met Lenny T. Lizard. It was a chance meeting between woman and reptile, but it changed her life. Through Lenny, Kathy learned that a lizard dies if it doesn't shed its skin. She saw it as a metaphor for life: if you don't shed what isn't working, the people and things that drain your life, you'll die.

In 2000, armed with her personal experiences, her newly acquired skills and Lenny, Kathy started her own motivational speaking business, Keep Shedding ([www.keepshedding.com](http://www.keepshedding.com)). Through her work, Kathy shares her journey with women, encouraging them to shed old, unwanted thoughts and behaviors that drain their energy and grow a "new skin" that covers them with energy. She also tells women that, "It's a process...but small, daily steps will add up."

Looking back, Kathy doesn't think it was the AIDS scare that almost took her life. Instead, it was the daily energy drains that deteriorated her sense of self-worth and self-esteem. When asked about obstacles, Kathy admits "I am my biggest resistance." But, she also says, that's not unusual for most woman. Kathy's victorious difference is her practice of shedding all the old, no-longer-useful bits and pieces of her life that don't make sense or have outlived their usefulness.

Every day, Kathy Dempsey continues to propel herself forward using the same tools she suggests to every woman: be honest, have a plan and get support. She also believes in the power of visualization. Kathy uses her visioning to help her get from one place to another place, e.g., from hospital administrator to nationally known speaker and author. From her own experience, Kathy insists, "We can make anything happen that we want."

## *Congratulations, Kathy!*

*Through your victorious example,  
you demonstrate for each of us how to live our lives  
with energy, enthusiasm and...**no regrets!***

**You can learn more about Kathy Dempsey, and her book,  
*Shed or You're Dead*, at her website [www.keepshedding.com](http://www.keepshedding.com)**