

Genia: Well. Hello my friend, Genia here. If you already know me, you know that health care, medical complexity and medical safeguarding are close to my heart - my passion. This episode was recorded before the pandemic because I know that just like me, your reality might include medical emergencies or health issues more often than the average parent. Now that we're in the middle of a global pandemic that impacts some vulnerable people more than others, but can impact any family, I know that this episode is important for you or someone you love. Let's get started.

Genia: Welcome to the Good Things in Life, the podcast that helps us support our kids with intellectual disabilities to build good, inclusive lives at home, at school, and in the community. I'm your host Genia Stephen. I'm a parent and a sibling and I've been learning and living the good things in life and the struggles with people with disabilities in their families for my whole life. I'm so excited that you're here. Today, I'm really excited to be here with my friend Judy Hunsberger, talking about self-care during high stress times in our lives. Let me give you a bit of a back story.

Genia: So Judy, several years ago now, was startled with her husband, to discover that her husband had heart disease and required bypass surgery. And as part of exploring that reality and what to do about that, they discovered that they could make a significant improvement to the health of their whole family by adopting a whole plant foods diet. And Judy didn't stop at helping her family adopt a healthy lifestyle, instead she put her 30 plus years as a teacher, counselor and administrator and coach to work on helping other women to become better versions of themselves. Judy went back to school and completed the Cornell University certificate program in Plant-Based Nutrition and she created the Plant-Based Resource Academy.

Genia: The Plant-Based Resource Academy is the place to learn how to successfully adopt a Whole food, Plant-Based (WFPB) Lifestyle. So here's the thing. Here's what I want to, why I wanted Judy to come on here today. This podcast is not about veganism. It is not about nutrition specifically, but it is about how we can with our kids with intellectual disabilities, ourselves and our families live good lives and have access to the good things in life. And part of that reality for many of us as parents is that we go through at least periods of time that are quite high stress. And one of the things that I have experienced during the highest stress times in our life, particularly, what comes to mind for me is the times when my son has been critically ill and hospitalized for long periods of time.

Genia: Is that my self-care, what little I have, like what little good habits I have tends to disintegrate. And recently, Judy and I were talking and Judy has recently had an extremely high stress, very difficult period of her life. And one of the things she said was that during this period of time she discovered that her habits around her nutrition actually sustained her through this period of time. And that just made my head snap up when she said that, that it sustained her self-care, sustained her during this period of time. Because usually what I hear around self-care habits, whether it's, you know, food or yoga or meditation, is that, you know, people are glad that they had those habits because they were in good shape when the stressful time started. And that after the stressful time kind of, there was a denouement or an end to that that they were able to get back into those habits.

Genia: But what Judy experienced was that her diet actually helped her to stay well during this period of time. And Judy, I wanted to say thank you so much for joining me here today. Thank you so much for being willing to share your story. I know that this is still very new and raw. And I've told you as moving up to this, I'm a little bit worried about you talking about this because it's just so fresh for you. So I'm so grateful that you are willing to tell your story and talk about how your self-care sustained you. And I wonder if you could just talk about kind of a little summary of what you've recently been going through.

Judy: Sure. Well, first of all, thanks for having me. And yeah, I do think the idea of self-care, which, you know, in theory and on paper, it sounds great and by no means would I say that I realize that I not necessarily conquered it, but that idea that I was able to build in various habits around eating well and resting well and, and even exercising well and those kinds of things during what was a storm in my life most recently made a huge difference. And I think what resonates with me and you know, we have this common issue, I think, um, particularly when we do face struggles that we tend to, and I shouldn't speak for everyone, but we put our own self-care, it kind of fades in the background. But what I found was that I was able to, because I have built these habits in unknowingly really, it sustained me. And all this to say, as you heard my husband, we found out he had heart disease.

Judy: We really set out to kind of manage that through eating well and getting out and exercising and what have you. But he had then, it kind of advanced itself a little bit in the fact that he had some challenges and with a pacemaker that did some damage to the right side of his heart. All this to say this led to the need for a heart transplant, which in and of itself is a clearly, it's a big deal. And we knew that. And one of the things that came along with it was to kind of manage all of his symptoms that went with it. So that meant being hospitalized and because of that, it was a very long journey. So most recently, it was in October, he was admitted into the hospital and then he was on the heart transplant list.

Judy: He had some complications with that. He ended up then having a total artificial heart installed just fairly recently. And things were looking well, but what ended up happening, he had some complications and much to our surprise, he did not survive. And so, here we've been since, well for weeks on end, hospitalized in and just moving towards what we thought would be a new heart. And, but that's not how it turned out. And during that time, one of the things that, you know, the staff, the hospital staff was really helpful and they talked about make sure you're eating well, make sure that you are, you know, you're taking a walk at least, you know, get out of that hospital room and every day. So that's what I did. I, on top of all of this, you know, we talk about stress and yeah, we all have stress. And, but this, I have to be honest, you know, I, I can look right now already and know this was the mother load of stress.

Judy: There's no doubt. I ended up having to commute. We chose, he was hospitalized three hours away from our home. I have, we have a 15 year old adept, you know, needed her, at least her parents as much as possible in their life. So I would commute back and forth. So I, I drove six to seven depending on traffic, eight hours a day, and then we'd sit at the hospital and the other times. So yeah, it was really not just the average every day. Yeah. My life is hectic. It clearly is one of those watershed moments. And you know, I, I was

able and have been able to look back and I managed because I built these habits into place and was able to employ them. Did I do it a 100%? Was I able to get out and walk 30 minutes a day, five days a week? No, but I knew every day I got up there and did that. I was able to, you know, carve out. You know, hospitals, as many of us know, the food is not necessarily the healthiest.

Genia: Yes, totally.

Judy: Kind of, you know, to me it's like an oxymoron almost. It's like, yeah, this is like some of the worse food, you know, that puts people in that very hospital. But, I managed to find every day things to eat that sustain me and what a gift to myself during this huge health storm. And that's the piece that, and I think my message really would be is building these habits because you never know when you really need them. And if they're built in, it's, you know, our bodies are really forgiving and they want, our bodies want to help us. And so mine certainly did during this incredibly stressful time.

Genia: Right. So I just want to, you mentioned the storm and I feel like that's a really apt way of kind of thinking about this period of time in your life. So we are recording this interview at the very end of January 2020 and Mark was admitted to the hospital in the beginning of October. Is that correct?

Judy: Yes.

Genia: And so of course, leading up to that admission, things were not easy. You know, prior to that. But I'm just trying to remember and I, and I don't, but I'm just trying to remember the number of times during, from when Mark was admitted until he passed away, when there was the conversation with you and Mark around this, this might be it. Like there was, he went into kidney failure. He, there was just like, it just felt like every time I got an update from you it was "We're feeling positive and optimistic", and he's had another life threatening complications.

Judy: Yeah, it was. You're exactly right. It was the, all of the [inaudible]. So yeah, he ended up multiple times. There was, yeah, his kidneys because of all of the meds and the stress on the organs that, you know, he went into kidney failure. So there was dialysis, 24/7 on that. He also then developed some internal bleeding because his body didn't care for the heparin. That was any, any little, you know, they asked Rick, they always warn you about of "Hey! The side effects could include", well my guy that was something that he ended up, he would be the one. But you know, he was this worrier that it was not in any way going to deter him. And so, you know, internal bleeding happened, they'd go in and find the bleed and they would fix it. And, and you know, it was just wave after wave.

Judy: He was on the transplant list and they would, we would get an offer, it's called and yet it wouldn't be the right size heart for him. And so, they put in two external pumps that, you know, really kind of sustain him for weeks on end, but then a pump would begin to clot and so they'd have to go in and repair that. So yeah, it was wave after wave of, you know, of again, unknown and stress. And yet, he would just, he would get bounced back in every turn. And that's why even though it was this long journey, we were very

surprised that the last, you know, big wave just is what took him out. And that wasn't any indicator. But you know, again, it was that fighting and truthfully the fact, the way that he of course, what kind of started us on this journey of changing our way of eating and eating, you know, getting rid of the processed foods and eating for us that turned into being whole foods that are plant-based. That's what actually fueled both of us to weather the storms and even while he was in the hospital because he made these lifestyle changes prior to this, he was definitely, he was a candidate. In fact, the health care staff continually commented because of the lifestyle choices he made that put him in the absolute best shape as a candidate for a heart transplant.

Genia: Right. And so I just have to like, it strikes me as you're talking that this is like Grey's Anatomy level shit here. You know what I mean? Like this is, this is the kind, like, this is like, you know, when Grey's Anatomy starts like making stuff up about like artificial hearts. This is kind of what Mark went through is like.

Judy: Seriously. Yeah.

Genia: And leaving his chest open because there was too much swelling, they couldn't get it like crazy Grey's Anatomy stuff. Okay. So I'm going to move away from this storm now that I feel like everybody has a good understanding of how much stress we're talking about. And I have two thoughts. One I think is maybe just a statement, but the next is a question. The statement is, you know, you were just talking about what the staff was saying about the Mark's ability to withstand all of the trauma and physical and emotional and psychic stress he was injuring, was largely due to the self-care habits that he had put in place years ago. And so I just want to point out, you know, this, we're talking about you managing stress because of what's happen, what you're experiencing vicariously. Well, literally and vicariously through watching a loved one endure this. But also that the experts at, was he at Cedars-Sinai? Is that right?

Judy: Cedars-Sinai in LA.

Genia: Yeah. Okay. So the experts at Cedars-Sinai were also very clear that he could not have lived through this had he not had these self-care habits in place himself or lived through as much as he did live through. So that's just a statement there. So in that, when we're wondering whether self-care actually is a luxury, you know, and you know, sometimes self-care gets marketed as kind of like lighting a candle and doing your nails and that's not what we're talking about here. But actually we're talking about not just in, not just in your capacity to endure extreme stress, but your capacity to live well.

Judy: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Genia: So, so you, when you and Mark made these changes years ago, how, can you talk about how, you didn't flip a switch, I'm sure. Like you had to, this all happened, but this happened after the habits were developed. So I'm interested in sort of how you went about making these significant changes that became so habitual to you and easy, not that every, any of this was easy, but it was ingrained already. And so you were able to sustain it. So I wonder if you could talk about the sort of beginning steps.

Judy: Sure. And, really it was almost a flip that was switched. No, did I say that right? Yeah. A switch that was, and the reason I say that is we had been watching, you know, like a lot of people what's on Netflix and there's some documentaries and there was a documentary called Forks Over Knives and it was in the time frame just, and I don't want to bore with details, but I think they're pertinent to how we got to this amazing point that we did. So it was April of 2013, we sat down and watched it and it was interesting. And it was like, "Oh yeah, you could", and I didn't know at the time, Forks Over Knives, I thought, oh, they're talking about, yeah, eat plant-based, which, you know, there's veganism, which is most people will eat no meat, no dairy, nothing with an animal, anything with a mother and [inaudible] they don't eat.

Judy: And that's for ethical reasons, but, and plant-based is not necessarily the ethical reasons, but it is because of the health reasons. And so this whole Forks Over Knives thing, I thought they were talking about forks, like, let's eat salads or you know, plants versus not [inaudible].

Genia: Right. That's not what they meant.

Judy: Yeah, no, apparently not. And I didn't know that at first because I didn't know. I, you know, ate the standard Western diet as did Mark. And it, a lot of it, truth be told and loved it all. And, but it was very compelling, the fact that if you eliminate the animal products, if you eliminate the processed foods and you eat foods that are whole grain in that, that you can mitigate a lot of these health problems. So we thought, "Oh yeah, that's really interesting. Oh, maybe we should do that." Had no real reason other than "Yeah, it sounds like a great idea."

Judy: Right after watching this, that was April. And then in June we find out that Mark ends up with, and again he's asymptomatic, he then has two 100% blockages in his heart and he needs a double bypass. But he had no symptoms at all. We had life by the tail, everything was great. Our daughter was eight at the time. And so we didn't think much of it until that, you know, daunting, here you go, you need to have this done. So that's when I got into high gear and said, "Wait a minute, remember that documentary we watch? How is it that they could reverse heart disease?" So God, I got pull on board with that. And, and so we ended up just kind of stop eating all of the animal products and the processed food at that point. And was it difficult? Absolutely. Our bodies had no clue what was going on, but I just knew something had to change.

Judy: And, and he was not necessarily what you'd call a willing participant at the time, but it was like, Hey, it's your body. You make your choice, but you know, we have an obligation to our eight year old to be as healthy as we can be. And if it means I'm not going to eat, you know, the cheese and all of this stuff I really love, well that's what it's going to be for me. And you're on your own if you're going to do it. And he came around to it and, and what we found out is the food isn't as bad as we thought and it's not as lacking. And he was a cook in our family and so he kind of really get into, you know, just, he call himself a meat loving vegan because, you know, we'd have meat holidays and that and, and where we would totally abandoned the whole food plant-based, which is, you know, it's fine.

Judy: And it worked out. But what we did find much to our surprise was it wasn't as difficult as we thought. And we started to feel a lot better. We didn't know we weren't feeling all that well. We started to just, we lost weight. He lost like 70 pounds. I know I lost quite a bit, you know, probably about 25 or so. Again, without really trying and, but it was more because we just knew something had to give. And then what also happened at that same time as we started to sleep better, we had energy to go out and take walks. We found that, you know, we, it just dropped and changed a lot of other things unintentionally. And so because of it, it became like, "Oh wow, look, this stuff, it's so crazy. It really does work and it's not as hard as we thought."

Judy: So that kind of really set the stage for really taking stock and making changes that little did we know, you know, fast forward nearly seven years and it got us through arguably the worst storm of our life and what a difference. So, you know, I would say it was little by little, we gave ourselves a lot of grace along the way in the sense that, okay, we maybe didn't get it, you know, perfectly right. And not all of the time, but wow. Clearly it was enough that it set the stage for what we just went through.

Genia: So you said at the beginning it was, it was hard and then you said it wasn't as hard as you thought. So was there sort of like a stumbling period in the beginning where it felt like a struggle?

Judy: Oh yeah. Because our bodies are all set with, you know, what it gets really used to the highly processed food. But here was the amazing thing that the hard part was the, just the, actually the first couple of weeks because the body was kind of detoxing from the processed food. And so all of the cravings that I had and Mark as well, they, they dissipated. Our bodies are so amazing. I guess, you know, we never really, I never really gave credit to how much our bodies appreciate good food and food that is not filled with all of the chemicals and not filled with the garbage that, you know, the additives that are put in. And so our taste buds had been so dulled. I had no idea how lacking I was in terms of food tasting good until we got rid of the junk. And, and so our taste buds just came alive. The colors of food, I remember thinking, "Man, I never knew food was this colorful before and just so beautiful", in the sense, and I know that sounds all hippy dippy and you know.

Genia: It's okay, you can be hippy dippy here if you want to.

Judy: But I wasn't. That my whole thing wants. I was, you know, I was born and raised in the Midwest and you know, we just, and yes, I moved to California and, and that's all she wrote. And you know, people would laugh at that, "Oh, you're just this hippie", "No, not really." But the thing was the cravings fell by the wayside and the body just took over and it was like, thank you. You know, we really, we're going to show you, food's going to taste better and like I said, you're going to feel better than you've ever felt just because you get rewarded for not putting the junk in it. And is there still plant-based food that's junk? Oh yeah. Really good at finding that too and eating that. And that's what puts weight back on me when I just, you know, you know. An Oreo is considered plant-based or vegan, but it doesn't make [inaudible].

Judy: And yeah, I can do Oreos from time to time, but it just, it was an amazing shift and faster than I thought. And so that's the part that I think, yeah, it was hard at first, but change I think for, you know, for me anyway, change can be difficult at first, but once the body gets used to it, it just, it just accepted and rewarded us in ways that we couldn't see at the beginning. But it wasn't as hard. And then the food, we had to learn to cook again. And that's not daunting to me because I wasn't a cook. Because Mark was, and I'll just kind of share this, our 15 year old, the other day, well, a couple now, maybe two weeks ago, she said, "Well, mom, I think you have just been elevated. You've been promoted to the head chef at our house."

Judy: And I said, "Yeah. Well, you're coming with me on this." And the reason I say this is, you know, both Mark and I had to learn how to cook again and again, that's not as daunting as it sounds. It's easy once she gets the hang of it and we learned to make it work and we learned that, you know, you can make this food and it doesn't have to be hours that you're chopping and cutting and figuring it all out. And clearly we made that work from October through January when I was in the car eight hours a day. You know, we figured it out and, and it's, it's not as hard. You know, there are other things in life, clearly, you know, that take precedence and making self-care fade into the background because it's so routinized. That's the gift you keep to yourself.

Genia: Right. Yeah. So you just answered my next question around how you managed to do that during this period of time. And I think at least part of the answer to the question is that it was already such a routine that it wasn't one more thing. It was just one like, you brush your teeth and this is the way you eat kind of thing. Like it was just a thing that is part of how you live your life. I know because we've chatted about this, that your diet certainly wasn't Pinterest-worthy during this period of time. You know, like it, it's not like you were certainly Mark was not in the position of head chef at that time. And you were not able to maintain the kind of food quality that you, that you were, you and Mark were before. But I wonder if you could talk about, I'm not really sure what the question is. I guess like obviously you were sometimes bringing food and sometimes eating in the cafeteria, and so the how is not as interesting to me I guess as the impact of not perfect, but not abandoning your habits.

Judy: Yeah. That part was, I had to just accept that. I think anytime any of us are going through, you know, really major issues and making this not just every time and not necessarily they have to be major issues. But I find that I, at least through this part of my journey, had to really just allow myself to be okay with the less than, you know, the less than perfect means, the less. You know, I'm not going to get out and, you know, exercise as much as I would like. That was non-existent truthfully. And times that, okay, maybe the sleep, although I really, I am really grateful I've built enough habits in, I was sleeping, you know, seven to eight hours a day that, I was kind of surprised by that too. Because I have an app that charts sleep and I was really surprised through this whole journey that I was able to maintain the sleep.

Judy: I would have thought that with the stress that I would have been fretting and not, you know, the quality of sleep would have been shot. But I think it was in part because of the way I was still able to manage to eat well enough to get out and walk, you know, even around those hospital grounds. I can tell you just about every spot as I'm sure any

parent or anybody who has a loved one in a hospital setting for any long term, you know, the locations [inaudible]. But that is what kind of, again carried me along throughout that time. And it definitely, you know, the how of it though, because I had it routinized prior to, and it's something that I help with people in the Plant-Based Resource Academy is just how do you go out in eat plant-based in a world that is not plant-based. What do you do and how? And so I really utilize a lot of those skills that I help others with [inaudible].

Genia: So the, the, one of the things that I think about fairly frequently, it's sort of a mindset block that I have is what you're talking around, talking about around feeling better is possible. So I, well fairly frequently think, I wonder if this is as good as it gets? You know. And then I'll have like brief periods of time where I have more energy and I'm sleeping really well and I'm eating well and I may be getting a little bit of exercise and I'm like, I feel great. And I'm like, "That's gotta be a passing fancy." You know, like I, you know, I've, I very rarely get really, really angry or frustrated, for example.

Genia: Like that's just not something I feel very often nor do I feel great very often. You know, like not, I don't mean emotionally, but just like typically I don't, I'm pretty low on the feeling great department and I often think I wonder whether or not this is as good as it gets or whether or not I'm thinking this as a, "Oh, it's probably as good as it gets", because that's a great excuse not to actually attend to my self-care. Because if I let myself believe that I might feel really quite a bit better than I do from day to day, then I really have zero excuse for, you know, not taking care of my self-care. So I don't know. I guess I'm just saying that out loud so that it's out there in the podcast universe and I can be held accountable if I would have said it out loud.

Judy: No, it is. It is. It's crazy because our bodies will really answer that question for us. It's like, "Dang it! It is true." You know. That's one of the things like, again, my body got so tuned to this good food, the healthy stuff that it doesn't like it anymore. It is not so good food. And I might, you know, go ahead and have something. And then, then I feel like crap like the next day and then I'm reminded, it's like, yeah, it's not worth it. And interesting you should say this, you know, the hospital food of course, not necessarily. And the kind of the joke mark, and I would say the heart-healthy was really not at all. And so he was very regimented from the hospital staff of what they could, what they would serve him and it wasn't plant-based. And, and he often in the journey would say, "I am just, I need to get back to that."

Judy: And again, this is not in any way will say you all have to switch your eating more so that our bodies really do respond. And, um, what was kind of funny was they got to a point where they're like, he's like, "Come on. I, you know, I know my body well enough and I know what fuels it to give me the kind of energy and the support I need." And we're working towards getting this, you know, this new heart and what it will take to, you know, sustain the recovery period. I need to eat the food that I know my body really appreciates. And so they lifted the ban on hospital food. And so we were able to take food from home in. And I say this with a chuckle because what ended up happening when we first started to bring him food that his body was used to, his body did not, you know, it kind of revolted because it had been on the standard Western diet now for quite awhile.

Judy: And to the point where, you know, his gut was reacting, so his gut tends to, it reinvents itself based on the food that we eat. And so his gut had to reinvent itself when he had the plant-based food come back in and they weren't sure what it was. And actually they had to do some abdominal ultrasounds on it [inaudible], no, we know it's the lentils and we know. But, all this again, to say that our bodies do respond and yeah, we do, we control that. And that kind of goes back to what you were saying about do we play mind games with ourselves of, "Okay, this is a reason why I will do something or not do something", and what does that play out? And I like that too. You know, it's like I am really one that I can, I can go off on a lag of "Oh this one, this is only temporary." It's okay, I can have and then fill in the blank, whatever that might be.

Judy: But then it becomes like I fall back into the other habits that don't make me feel as good. And the question of is this as good as it gets? Well, what I've learned really is it's amazing when I do really put that self-care into action, just how great I feel and it's worth it. That to me is when it becomes the Aha, Okay, Yeah. It might feel easy and good temporarily to, you know, not take care because it's satisfying some, you know, whatever emotional trigger, eat this food or that or you know, I'm not going to get up and go for a run or you know, and I'll make the reasons why I shouldn't. But the payoff on the other side is just that much worthy. There's so much so that for me, I'd prefer to do that. Does that mean I'm a 100% all of the time? No, that's okay though. But yeah. And now that I'm older too, I know I have much more energy than people at a fraction of my age. And so for me.

Genia: And me. You have a ton more energy than me.

Judy: Well, you know, and it is, it's easy to, and I think for me anyway, it's easy not to pay attention to the things I should be doing. But the biggest gift I gave to myself and you know, when we started this, how many years ago now, it's almost seven years ago, it was really so that we wouldn't feel diseased or wouldn't face health issues that would rob us of our family time. But we've got so much more out of it, you know, it's just the fact that we could be present with our kiddo that we could do things as a family and we weren't, that's the other, Oh my gosh. The other huge benefit in all of this, our immune systems are really surprising.

Judy: Not, I guess I shouldn't be surprised by it, but, and I don't want to, I don't want to jinx or anything, but it's fairly ironclad in that we don't get sick very often. And if, and when we, when I say sick, you know, we, colds, no, I don't know the last time I've had a cold. My kid has run, Oh, last couple. And this is not in any way, I'm not trying to brag or anything along these lines, but perfect attendance, you know, is not, you know, out of the ordinary for her. We're not seeing the kinds of things that we get hit with others get hit with. And if we do get anything, it blows over so quickly and so mildly that if it's worth the pay off, it really has been.

Genia: So Judy, you teach seven realms of self-care and as we've said, this podcast episode is not, the point is not whole plant food diet. The point is developing strong self-care habits to sustain you through the difficult times in your life. And also we've been talking about just also how good solid health care habits can make your life much, much better or just like level up your life when things are not, not terrible. So I wonder if you could

list as we wrap up here, list the seven areas of self-care habits, and then we will, and then I'd love to share where people can learn more about the Plant-Based Resource Academy.

Judy: Sure. So we know that self-care, it's really, and this is the key. It's that deliberate activity and that's in order to take care of in this, I call it like the three legged stool. It's one's physical, emotional and mental health. And so because of that and they're all linked together, we can't necessarily separate that out. And I think that's sometimes can feel daunting that, "Oh my gosh, we have to take care of all of these pieces." But, it's been pretty clear there's a lot of evidence that suggests these seven areas, if you just began to really, first of all be deliberate about it. And it doesn't have to be all at once in every area. But just if you have that, that's the other part because our lives are all too busy to try to take on everything, but it's eating well.

Judy: So that's, you know, the one area, and again, for me and what I know best and what I teach, it's eating the whole foods that are plant-based. But I'll tell you what, if that's not your thing, that's fine. My biggest piece of advice or suggestion, if you can eliminate as many of the processed foods as possible and take out or just add in a little bit more of foods that don't have labels on them. I think that's easily sweet. But eating well goes a long way. Resting well, it is very clear. I'm seven to eight or more hours of sleep a night that's linked to so many benefits. And I know it's like who has time to sleep that much? And I know my body clock isn't necessarily wired for that, but it eventually got wired a little bit more. But along with that resting well, some type of daily, either meditation and or prayer is a big part.

Judy: And I know that's another aspect of our, when I say our, Mark and my journey, meditation and prayer just sustained us and that hugely made quite a difference in our journey. But it's that resting well, exercising well, and I got really, I'm so thrilled to be able to share it. You know, there's that whole adage you need, How many steps a day? Like 10,000 steps. Well, guess what? No. Big news slash for everyone, I'm delighted to tell you, that was a marketing statement made by the pedometer makers that created that. And you don't really need that much. It really comes down to 30 minutes of just walking or you know, five days a week. We're talking 10 minutes for three times a day for five days, yoga, any kind of thing that exercise, just movement and all, you know. And here's the thing, you don't have to bear a lot of guilt with this. If you just park further back and walking or if you, you know, you'd get out of the car and you go get your kid and instead of just waiting for them, you build in, you know, deliberate time.

Judy: It goes back to them being deliberate. Playing well, here's one thing and I think a lot of us, particularly women and particularly moms, we forget to do that. We don't make time at all, but the idea is to allow time to socialize with others. And here's the kicker, to do an offline as well as online, to get out there. And who has time and particularly I think, those with family members, loved ones with special needs, who has time to find a hobby and to devote time with that? But that's part of that deliberate activity that could really be helpful. And then here's another one that's kind of hidden, but I think really one that's easy to do if we're looking for quick hits, low hanging fruit, it's just being thankful. Look for things to be thankful for, to show gratitude.

Judy: And here you're set other piece that I know again, because I developed that habit. It really sustained me during this just dramatic part of my life is to give and receive grace. It goes back to what we talked about earlier. Give myself grace. Okay, I can't eat this particular way, but here's what I can do instead. So it is, it's giving and receiving that towards others as well as towards yourself. And then here's the other one. It's making time and who has time? I get that, but it's making self-care a priority. So it's kind of a twofer. If you're going to find that you just slept eight hours a night, well guess what? You just developed a self-care habit that you made time for yourself and making that a priority. And then the other way, and I think I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of the people that you serve do this really well and that is being helpful.

Judy: And the way to help others though is to help yourself first. I think so many of us are, you know, we're genuine helpers to our family, to loved ones, friends, to the community at large. But you know, we have to be able to do that for ourselves. And so taking the time and making an agreement with yourself that, "Okay, it may not be perfect, but I am going to", and then fill in the blank. I'm going to try to get to bed earlier tonight. Or maybe it's the other end. I'm going to get up earlier and I'm going to carve out 10 minutes. It doesn't have to be much, you know, for some meditation or just being quiet. Oh my gosh. You know, I, that's one of the things that I just built in and my family knows. Do not, do not come in and start the day off trying to talk with me.

Judy: If you, you know, I'm taking the first 10 minutes of my day, that's my quiet time and I'm talking it's 10 minutes. So you all can stay out of my life for 10 minutes and you know, whatever it is, it can wait. That's self-care and it's deliberate and I guard that. And it can't, it doesn't have to be, I think, you know how everybody talks about these big, you know, start of every year you need a word, you know, whatever the word for the year. You know, my 2019 ended, you know, in a way I didn't expect. You know, Mark died on New Year's eve. And so, my new year started off a little bit differently than any ever in my whole life. And so this whole, let's think of a word, hasn't really come to be, but it has, it's now entered in and I think it's simplified and simplistic.

Judy: And that's what I, I think part of my message for anybody who might be listening to this is it's okay to, you know, find things in its most simple form. So it's okay to take 10 minutes for yourself. It's okay to, you know, instead of picking up whatever processed food, you know, just go for something again without a label. It's simple. It doesn't have to be complicated. And it's that act of being deliberate. And so if I need to be deliberately simplifying my life, well that's what I'm going to try to do in 2020. And I wish everybody else can find in their own way where to actually become delivered with their self-care because it really in those huge storms becomes more important than I ever realized. And it's a gift you give to yourself and to your loved ones.

Genia: Thank you very much, Judy. If people want to connect with you and find out more about the Plant-Based Resource Academy, how should people find you? How can people catch you?

Judy: Sure. I, you can go to plantbasedresourceacademy.com. I know it's a mouthful. Maybe you could link that for them.

Genia: There will definitely be a link. Yup.

Judy: Okay. There's that. And then if you are somebody who is interested in trying plant-based, you got a five day freebie that you can just look at it, if nothing else, to get an idea of just what it is and what it means and you can find that there.

Genia: Great. Judy, thank you so, so much. I'm really, really grateful that you were willing to come on the podcast today, that you are willing to share your story especially given that it is so terribly fresh and to share your wisdom and your experience. Thank you so much.

Judy: Well thank you and thanks for what you're doing for your community. It's really important work.

Genia: Thanks Judy.

Genia: Judy and I wrapped up our interview and then as we were just chatting, she started talking about her experiences as a teacher and as a school principal and what she had seen over hundreds of IEP meetings. So I hit the record button again cause I thought it might end up being valuable for us. Here we go.

Judy: Think family, just you know, what they're dealing with and how particularly the moms just did not have their own self-care a priority. And so they, they'd sit, like I said, the number of IEPs and just the hours, that time spent with the families. Just what a unnecessary thing that you're providing in terms of become aware of what's going on, you know, with your own bodies and take care of yourself. You're the caregiver, but man, you're no good if, you know, for your own family, if you're not taking care of yourself. So I saw that very sharply.

Genia: Yeah. It's, it's, I feel like there's a degree of like, almost self sabotage that's really common. Like the coping mechanisms that we fall back on are, actually, they're just sabotage. And I'm not sure where that comes from. I mean, I could hazard some guesses, but I don't think it's, I honestly don't know that it even matters that much to figure out where it came from. So much as

Judy: You know, part of it, I think it goes back to, in so many circumstances, we don't have control of many, many things. But making choices, being them good choices or not good, that I have control over. And so if it's good, then, you know, sometimes I self sabotage because it's like, well, I don't feel like, you know, taking the high road in this meaning.

Genia: Making a good decisions. Yeah.

Judy: Yeah, yeah. Because you know what, I, this is something I can choose. And I, and I'm fine with this choice at this time, but I did myself into a hole then [inaudible].

Genia: Right. Yeah. I feel like there's a piece of it that's like, well, I deserve this. Like I deserve this treat or break or whatever. But for me, I'm trying to change. So there's two, there's

two pieces, my mind goes two ways. There's a piece of me that's like, I deserve this, let's say glass of wine or whatever my, like whatever the thing is. Like not going for a run, but instead sitting on the couch and watching something on Netflix or whatever, whatever.

Judy: Sure. Yeah.

Genia: Like I have ever chosen to go for a run, by the way, that's a total joke.

Judy: But, you know, we, I have to tell you that was the same with me. And you know what, that is a whole other story. However, my girl friends who you know, Oh my gosh, this is now been lots and lots of years ago, there was the one [censored] girl friend, she was like, "Hey, you know what? There is this half marathon in San Francisco and they give you a Tiffany necklace at the end of it and they give you chocolate on the way. We are going to do this." We are on a girl's weekend that she says this and she's like, we're doing this. This is like in whatever months. And none of us, I mean we're all overweight. We were all, you know, couch potatoes. None of us had ever done it. It was like, "We're doing this, I want that necklace and we're doing it." And I'm like, "Screw the necklace. I want the chocolates." So we are **chewing that night evilly**. But it was that whole thing of, "Yeah, this is more fun not to." And so all this to say, I never would have thought I could have done any of that nor my [censored] friends. And yeah, we now have routinely done. And the one who she is still going strong, she now does all sorts of things. It's just crazy. So never say never, I guess is my [inaudible].

Genia: Right, right. Well, what I was saying about the, like I, I sometimes feel like, "Oh, well I deserve this". And I've been thinking as I try and change my mindset around it and as I get tired of feeling terrible all the time, or at least not great. I don't feel terrible all the time, but not great is actually I deserve to feel great. And so there's that sort of like, just changing like what is it I deserve?

Judy: Yeah. That's a great idea. Shift the paradigm and the why not.

Genia: Yeah. And the other piece of it is that the, like the I don't take care of, or as a mom, I you know, take care of everybody else before I take care of myself. That's never resonated as actually being totally true for me. Like I don't think I'm particularly self-effacing or like, I don't consider my own needs or anything like that. What I don't consider, what I do do is take care of other people's wellness and don't consider and take care of my own wellness particularly well. But I don't love the like, "Oh, is ma-" Like, it feels like it's like some martyrdom or something. And I don't feel like I live my life like a martyr, you know? Like I,

Judy: No, I hear you. Yeah.

Genia: I'm no Mother Theresa.

Judy: No, I hear you on that because that was my story for a very, very long time. Because it's like, well, yeah, I'm a helper so everybody else gets, but I don't help myself. And not that I deserve it or didn't, I mean I had to kind of navigate through that piece, but it's like,

well, it didn't occur to me that I need to take care of myself. And I think another part is because I'm, even before I changed this, I was pretty healthy. I didn't, you know, I didn't have a lot of issues, so it was really easy not to have to pay attention to any of it. And had Mark not, and that was the other thing. We were so caught off guard by Mark's asymptomatic piece with the heart disease that it was like, "Oh. Well maybe I need to look at my own self." And it really, I think we're totally motivated by, you know, we were older parents to begin with and how unfair that was for our kid. And I think that was the Genesis of it, but you know, that's not the case. But you know, it does resonate like I have not been back out, you know, on run that's been months now and I've made a boatload of excuses of, "It's pretty cold here in the morning. I'm not going to go do that walk right away."

Genia: In California.

Judy: In cold. Exactly. [inaudible] I mean, it's like in the forties.

Genia: Yeah. And as, as we're, as we're discussing or as you know, we're having this discussion, I have a two gone cause I'm in Canada.

Judy: I understand. Is it all relative? But it goes back to that, yeah, I'm like, I deserve, you know. I've had this beautiful excuse for months now and now that's, you know, that's gone. And it's like, okay, when am I going to really face up that? And so I was telling myself not too long ago, "Well, okay, it's going to start getting warmer so I will pour de just go later in the day", which is what I've been trying to do. But on the master at finding reasons why I don't need to.

Genia: Right. Yeah, me too. Totally. And I guess part of the way to do this in like to attempt to build and maintain some of these habits in a way that really actually benefits us is to keep in mind that piece that you were talking about around grace. Like the point is not to make, did to add things that like, or like one more thing that we're failing at. That's not, that's not actually building our overall wellness, but also telling ourselves stories that aren't entirely true so that we've got an excuse to not attend to it at all is also not in our best interest.

Judy: No. It's that tight rope, you know, that fine line you walk of, "Oh yeah, no, I don't really need this." Yeah. Or the other part for me that trips me up a lot is, well, you know, I then really, you know, I'm fine with this, I can have this because I've, you know, fill in the blank. I've eaten well recently so this won't matter. [inaudible] back, you know, whatever. And, and I think I like what you said, it's a story that I tell myself like, "Dang, change this story."

Genia: Yeah. Cause these stomach cramps suck.

Judy: Well that is the beautiful thing. As much as I hate it, my body now has, it does not let me get away with stuff. And it's like, okay, do you really want that? No. Okay. Bye. And that's why we did laugh our ass off when they, you know, "Oh we better check this out. You just keep Mark, have another internal bleed." And then my brother in law said, "No,

it's the lentils we gave him." And then they kept coming back and they, "We couldn't find anything." And we were like, "Well, we know why." Because they kept saying, "Don't give him too much right away. "But he's like, "I so miss that. I'm really hungry for our homemade food." It's like, "Yeah. How much did that cost?"

Genia: Yeah, I would love to see the, it's too bad you can't edit the entries into like to the health system. You know, three abdominal wall ultrasounds to find a gas related to lentil consumption.

Judy: Yeah. Exactly. Oh yeah, no. I'll tell you. They sent me, in they sent me a shock wave and I don't know about your health care system, which I'm sure is far superior to ours in terms of the billing. I got this stack and it was this big and I packed, I thought, "Oh, Cedars-Sinai, they're just mailing me that", you know how organizations send out their annual statement and with all their, you know. And so I thought that was it. You know about how they, you know, how great their inside facility. And I opened it up and Holy shit, it was a 91 page document, every itemized thing. So I could actually go back and find out what that ultrasound costs. And it was just staggering. And then they also had a balance due and I'm like, "Oh, yeah. Well, [inaudible]. We're in a big plate for that to begin with." But yeah, it's crazy.

Genia: Talk about managing stress.

Judy: Well, that one sent me really, I mean, it was just, it's nuts. It is beyond insane and for what result? That's the thing I really [inaudible]. Come on people. Oh, well it's called life.

Judy: Yeah. Yeah. All right Judy. Well, we should wrap this up. We're going to see each other again if you're available soon actually.

Judy: Yeah, [inaudible].

Genia: Later today. All right, well, I'll talk to you soon.

Judy: Well, thank you again. I really appreciate it.

Genia: Thanks Judy.

Genia: All right, so what health care habits do you feel you could be working on or should be working on and what are your thoughts around actually feeling better and having more resilience and being able to ride the waves of life from a better, stronger position? I got to say for me it's been something that I'm thinking more and more about and I'm really feeling like taking care of my own wellness is going to be a requirement if I'm going to continue taking care of other people. I hope that this has been valuable. I'd love to hear your feedback, the resources around or the contact for the Plant-Based Resource Academy. Excuse me. We'll be in the show notes and you can get the five day menu download that Judy mentioned there. You can also leave a comment and tell me what you are doing for self-care or what you think you ought to be doing.

Genia:

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