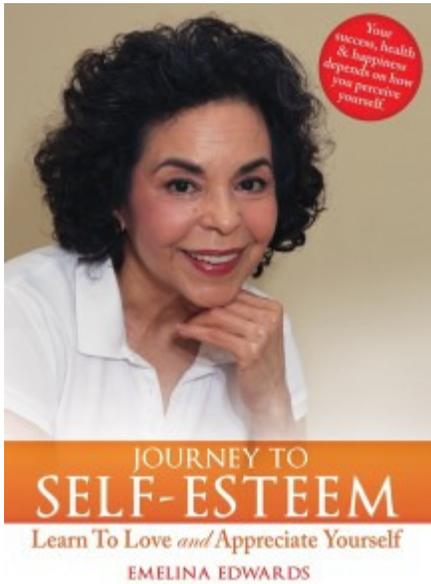


Journey to Self-Esteem Introduction



The idea for this book has been with me for 27 years.

It began with my own search for self-esteem at age 46, when I promised myself I'd create a new life based on a new me. The life I had expected to forever keep me secure and stable lay shattered at my feet. I knew instinctively I either had to change or succumb to the dark forces of depression and hopelessness.

But before I could create a new me, I'd have to face what I had denied up to that moment: I despised myself and felt totally inadequate. Ashamed for losing my self-respect for many years, I told myself I would no longer experience the humiliation and entrapment of my past. I was ready to change.

I began my transformation by researching ways of healing my fractured self-esteem. I wanted and needed tools to build my self-confidence and sense of self. I had begun to progress due to my weight training, as each new session at the gym strengthened me physically, mentally, and emotionally. But I wanted more.

I wanted to grow into a new level of being, one I had never known before, but only read about in books. I wanted my true, core self to shine through completely, to fully express my truth, beauty, and goodness.

Up until then I had hated myself: my body, my inadequacies, my powerlessness, my inability to express basic needs and to stand up for myself. Whenever I let my fear keep me from standing up for myself, I would mercilessly beat myself for days afterwards.

Feeling inadequate limited my choices, crippled my ability to function and, as a result, stunted my growth. I didn't finish college because terror gripped me every time I felt the professor looking my way, getting close to calling on me. I was consumed by a horrible feeling of dread. One day I walked out and didn't go back. I was sure I couldn't do what others could because I was lacking what I needed to succeed.

Psychologically immature, even 26 years later, with undeveloped life skills due to my low self-esteem, I found myself in an abusive relationship. I felt trapped, but couldn't leave for fear I couldn't support myself or live alone.

The humiliation that eats at the soul when one has to bow before he who holds the power of the purse-strings eventually eats away at the body too. My self-talk sounded like this:

“You’re worthless and inadequate. You cannot leave your miserable life because you cannot support yourself. You could never earn enough money to pay your bills. Look at you, you don’t even have a college degree. Who do you think would hire a middle-aged woman, a Latina at that, without proper education? You should consider yourself lucky that you’re provided for, even though you’re miserable in your relationship and sometimes you want to kill yourself. If sometimes you want to disappear from this planet because you feel like you don’t belong, that’s ok, because suffering is part of life, so get used to it. This is a cruel world, there’s no mercy for people like you. If you left, you would get swallowed up and end up a bag lady, pushing a grocery cart down the street. And, by the way, don’t dare confide in anyone about how you really feel because they will want to know what made you this way, and you’ll have to talk about your past, and you know what that means. No one in their right mind who knows your history would ever speak to you again. Remember that time at that party when that guy asked you about Nicaragua, your birthplace, and you shot out of your seat as if lit by a torch? Well, you did the right thing. Happy people who had happy childhoods don’t want to hear your miserable story. They would be shocked to hear where you really come from. So keep quiet, and just tell people what they want to hear, that way you’ll be safe. If you think you feel alone now, imagine if you dumped your hard-luck story on their lap. And by the way, those memories from your past that sometimes pop into your head wanting to be noticed, keep pushing them away because if you let them out and start thinking about them, you won’t survive the onslaught of emotions that will follow. They will swallow you up.”

This toxic self-talk kept me prisoner for years. Terrified of a past I couldn't own and anxious over a future I believed would be worse than death, I remained stuck in a constant state of panic, demoralized and resigned to being victimized. I lived with a pervasive feeling of debilitating fear.

As a result of years of self-induced suffering, I got cancer. Surviving cancer made me see that, in fact, I could endure lesser challenges, like getting a divorce and struggling to survive on my own. Cancer was the impetus I needed to finally connect my victim mind to my painful circumstances and commit to creating a new mindset with belief in unlimited possibility. This decision birthed my journey towards self-love. Knowing that I would face tough challenges creating a life all on my own

for the first time, I joined a gym and started working out with weights. I wanted to be as healthy and as strong as possible, so I could meet life as a force of nature, not as a wimp.

I found my voice at the gym. My mind and body began to come together, when I realized I was responsible for my thoughts and made the connection between my thoughts, feelings, emotions, and actions. I realized I no longer had to listen to my negative voice, I could call on my strengths by using my positive voice.

My hobby became my profession, and soon thereafter I became a fitness trainer. As I worked with clients of all ages, listening to their self-doubting and self-rejecting monologues, it became crystal clear that the problem of low self-esteem was severe and pervasive.

More shocking than the words themselves, the perpetual practice of self-hating language continues to be acceptable to this day. Women don't cringe when they hear a friend say her legs are "hunks of blubber," or "I hate my fat stomach," but rather commiserate by pointing out their own hated body parts. Most people do not realize that this self-hatred eats away at our self-respect and self-value and ultimately can trigger disease.

My intention with this book is to shed some small light on this social problem and give my readers hope for restoring their self-value by learning to love themselves.

Friends and clients who know me today as a successful, happy, and assertive business woman who has sustained a 27-year career as a fitness trainer, motivational speaker, and now author find it difficult to imagine me as the opposite: a painfully shy, people-pleasing, passive woman. But, that's exactly who I was—until I began to change my opinion of myself.

I've learned through my extensive research and study that my self-opinion was shaped, as a child, by messages from those around me. But, as an adult, I may choose my thoughts, and these have by far the greater impact on my self-esteem. We cannot change what occurred in the past, but we can change the present by learning to reframe all negative thoughts regardless of their source.

I know from experience that self-esteem is fundamental to success. Without it I could not have taken risks, learned new skills, unleashed my creativity, and courageously leapt into the challenging opportunities that have allowed me to reach my fullest potential.

Self-esteem is also essential to our overall mental, emotional, and physical health. Constant anxiety over our inability to succeed, including obsessing over our appearance or what others think of us take a heavy toll on our health, constantly draining away our stores of energy and leaving us susceptible to illness as we deplete our immune defenses.

We often underestimate our ability to grow out of destructive patterns believing that yesterday's patterns will be tomorrow's behaviors and that nothing can be done to change them. Or we recognize that change may be possible, but it's too hard to even contemplate.

I invite you to join me in refusing to accept such limiting beliefs. The pain of self-rejection is too great. I know from real experience that if you feel less than your best self, you can change that perception and learn to love yourself.

When you love yourself, others will love you. When you respect yourself, others will respect you. When you believe you're capable, others will recognize your capabilities. When you believe you deserve all life has to offer, you'll get the job you want, the raise you've been waiting for. When something doesn't suit you, you'll say so. When you look in the mirror you will see strength and beauty. When you look toward your future you will feel joy as you imagine your infinite soul guiding you into eternity.

Let's begin the journey to strengthen your relationship to yourself, the most important relationship you will ever have. When we change how we perceive and feel about ourselves, it infuses every area of our lives with a newfound sense of freedom and joy, the true gift of embodying a healthy sense of worth.

This book is a companion journal to my first book *Forever Fit and Fabulous: A Guide to Health and Vigor—Even at 70 and Beyond* where I introduced and stressed the essential importance of self-esteem. In *Journey to Self-Esteem, Learning To Love and Appreciate Yourself*, my primary focus is strengthening and nurturing self-esteem with exercises and techniques to restore your sense of self so that you can take your rightful place in the world. I will share what made the difference in my own journey to self-esteem, particularly how I learned to accept, appreciate, and love myself. My wish is that the strategies, skills, and philosophies that I present will inspire you to embrace your own self-value.

When we share our stories we share our truth and this sharing helps us make sense of our own lives. When others triumph over their struggles, it encourages and inspires us to persevere.

Come with me, dear reader, to rebuild and strengthen your self-esteem. Take the universal truths at the heart of each story and allow it to shed light on your own experience.

May you find the love of self that is innately part of our divine nature.

Emelina Edwards

Summer, 2014

The Shriver Report: Self-Esteem and the Economic State of the American Woman

As I put the finishing touches on this book, alarming news hit the airwaves: according to the *Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Pushes Back from the Brink* (January 12, 2014), more than a hundred million people, of which 42 million are women, live in poverty or on the edge of it.

Coauthored by Maria Shriver and the Center for American Progress, the report shows that one-third of American women is living one single incident—a doctor's bill, a late paycheck or a broken-down car—away from economic disaster. The cause of the problem, says the report, is the combination of both social and economic factors.

The mission of the report is to shed light on the problem, identify why it matters, and what we as a nation can do about it, while also pinpointing what women need now to be successful in today's economy.

The Life Ed curriculum developed for the report by Anne Mosie and Ascend at the Aspen Institute, identify, among other tools and skills, **Self-Esteem Development**. It touches me deeply that The Shriver Report found that developing self-esteem is crucial for women to meet the demands of today's world. Twenty-seven years ago I found myself in the same situation as the women in the study. I can remember a Christmas when I only had \$200 in the bank.

But, thanks to divine intervention and my willingness to take responsibility for my demise and forge a new life for myself, I became a success story instead.

When my intuition commanded me to "Go get healthy!" I hit the gym even though I had never been in one before and started working out when I didn't know what working out meant. And when I was again directed to "Go teach!" I picked up the phone and began to recruit clients even though I had never taught before. When I wrote my first fitness article and wasn't sure it was good enough, I sent

it in anyway, and when offered to be interviewed before television cameras I agreed, even though I had never spoken before a camera and was terrified of doing it.

It's been this way for me for 27 years. I listen to my inner voice and follow through in spite of my fears because for one, the opportunity may not come again, and, secondly, by complying, I show gratitude for God's love.

I responded immediately to the Shriver Report though the Center for American Progress website, and wrote the following:

When I read *The Shriver Report: A Won's Nation Pushemas Back from the Brink*, my first thought was: "That could be me."

Twenty-seven years ago at age 46, I found myself divorced, broke, and depressed. For the first time in my life I would be responsible for myself economically and without a college degree I was fearful of being unemployable. Who would hire a middle-aged Latina with only a high school education?

But one day I stopped listening to my negative voice and began to pay attention to my inner guidance.

Through God's grace I realized I needed to recreate myself if I wanted a different life.

I started working out, and when I saw how weight training had transformed my body, I knew it could do the same for others. I realized that I could be the one to teach them, so I became a trainer.

Today, at age 73, I'm happy, healthy and successful. I share the tools that got me here in my book, *Forever Fit and Fabulous: A Guide to Health and Vigor—Even at 70 and Beyond*.

This is my second book, *Journey to Self-Esteem, Learning to Love and Appreciate Yourself*, published in the summer of 2014. This book offers hope to the reader in the form of tools, philosophies, and techniques that worked for me and can work for anyone.

I'm thrilled to see self-esteem included in The Shriver Report's list of tools and skills needed for a woman to succeed in life.

