



THE COMMITTEE IS IN SESSION

by Lori Hartwell

I've had to undergo two surgeries in the past 6 months. One was an emergency hysterectomy: My gynecologist found a tiny spot of cancer and said that if I acted quickly, he could take care of it and I wouldn't have any further complications to deal with. The second surgery was a total hip replacement that was on my to-do list for when my schedule was free. Yeah, right! I was clearly in denial over how much hip pain I was experiencing. When it started to wake me from a sound sleep, I knew that I had to schedule the surgery.

But I was angry that I had to deal with yet more health issues! Would I ever get a break? I was upset that I had to relinquish control and sign the consent papers. The critic in my head (I fondly call it "the Committee") was cranking out questions at warp speed. What if my kidney is damaged? What if I can't walk afterward? What if I get an infection? How am I going to deal with the pain and the recovery process? What if they find more cancer? Will I be able to fulfill my obligations?

The list went on and on. Bottom line: I don't want to be a burden to anyone. I've learned that the best way to quiet the Committee is to talk to a good friend or write about what I'm feeling. Doing both is ideal. When I communicate about the emotional

upheavals that are taking up space in my head, my anxiety often subsides, and I can then focus on what I have to do and prepare for a speedy recovery or whatever comes next

Pick Up the Phone. When I knew that I had to have surgery, I started calling friends who had these same types of surgeries. They told me their stories, explained what to expect, and gave me questions to ask the doctor. The more they talked, the quieter the Committee became. We're so lucky to have social media at our fingertips; if you post that you want to chat on the phone with someone who has had a particular procedure, your in-box will be full in no time.

Grab a Pen and Paper or Let Your Smartphone Do the Typing.

Don't over think it—just begin writing and the words will eventually come. Your words aren't for publication, so allow yourself the luxury of not being perfect. What works for me is to put one word that describes the emotion I'm feeling or the goal I want to tackle at the top of the page. Then I jot down all my thoughts on that topic.

This exercise lets me clarify what the Committee is actually trying to say to me and helps quiet the voice in my head. Also, we have this great invention called voice-activated text. I can talk

to my smartphone about what I'm feeling, and the words magically appear. This is a great way to jump-start your writing. There are a number of options for creating voice-activated text with your computer too. When I tried it many years ago, the text that appeared after I said something looked like gibberish. Today the software is so sophisticated that it requires only a few tweaks.

One of the best ways to become a better writer is to read good books. Bill Bryson, who wrote the nonfiction bestseller *Walk in the Woods*, is one of my favorite authors. He has the amazing ability to tell a great story.

Take Control of the Committee.

Life is too short to let the Committee in your head ruin your enjoyment of life. Talk to friends or write about your feelings. Vincent van Gogh said it well: "If you hear a voice within you say 'you cannot paint,' then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced."

Lori Hartwell, founder & President of the Renal Support Network (RSN), was diagnosed with kidney disease at the age of two. In 1993 she founded RSN to instill "health, happiness and hope" into the lives of those affected by chronic kidney disease. Lori is also the author of the book "Chronically Happy: Joyful Living in Spite of Chronic Illness" and is a four-time kidney transplant recipient.