

## My Art/Life Experience and Post-Traumatic Growth

**By Dr. Maria Gray-Gerhart**

There's a version of resilience people are comfortable with.

The polished version.  
The inspirational version.  
The version where someone overcomes something neatly and emerges "better" with a perfect lesson tied up in a bow.

But that's not what posttraumatic growth has looked like for me.

This week, while rolling out my eight-piece series *Holding Myself Together*, my very first art series ever attempted, I was also fighting battles most people will never see.

I am currently being reviewed for long-term disability because my body no longer allows me to work the full-time career I once had. And in the middle of that process, I learned something deeply unsettling: strangers can sit behind screens, comb through your social media, and attempt to use moments of your joy, your art, your expression, or your survival against you.

As though creating while chronically ill somehow erases the illness.  
As though moments of light invalidate years of darkness.  
As though art is the same thing as physical capacity.  
As though purpose means you are no longer struggling.

At the exact same time, I became severely sick from a medication my GI doctor should never have prescribed given my medical history. It affected me mentally in ways that scared me. Deeply. I experienced suicidal ideation, and because I know myself, because I stay aware of my patterns, because I have learned to listen carefully to my own mind and body, I recognized that something was wrong.



And I stayed on top of it.

Not perfectly.  
Not gracefully.  
Not without fear.

But intentionally.

That matters.

And still... through all of it... I continued rolling out this series.

Not because I was "pushing through" to prove resilience.  
Not because I wanted to perform strength for the world.  
Not because I'm magically healed.

But because this is my actual life.

This is what posttraumatic growth actually looks like.

It is not what we do once we are fixed.  
It is what we choose inside the lives and bodies we actually have.

It is learning that even from the deepest fractures, something meaningful can still flow outward from us.

Our art.  
Our words.  
Our love.  
Our purpose.  
Our connection.  
Our humanity.

We do not have to become untouched by suffering before we are allowed to create again.

We do not have to wait until we are whole to contribute something beautiful.

Sometimes resilience is not standing tall.  
Sometimes resilience is quietly pulling yourself through the next hour.  
Sometimes resilience is recognizing danger and protecting yourself.  
Sometimes resilience is making art with shaking hands.  
Sometimes resilience is choosing not to disappear.

And maybe that's what Holding Myself Together has really been about all along.

Not perfection.  
Not overcoming.  
Not pretending.

Just the sacred act of continuing.

Of gathering the pieces.  
Of carrying light anyway.  
Of allowing something honest and alive to still come through us, even here.

I integrate the experience with the use of a few of my favorite essential oils, so I thought I would list them here in case you want to acquire a few prior to the session and partake. You can find them at any wellness shop...I am also an advocate with DoTerra Essential Oils and would be happy to help if you are interested, but that is 100% up to you!

The oils I will use include the following:

frankincense  
magnolia  
eucalyptus  
lavender  
grapefruit  
green mandarin  
lemon  
neroli

I am grateful to know and learn from each and every one of you. Thank you for taking this journey with us and for allowing me to share what I am learning as well.

Maria

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