

ROUND THE TABLE

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Intentional happiness

If we rely on external factors to be happy, we will be forever yearning for it, **Allison Massari** told attendees. A success coach and artist, Massari learned this lesson when she was severely burned in a car accident.

“I was hit by a car at 60 miles per hour, trapped inside, consumed by fire and nearly burned to death,” she said. Massari explained that flames were shooting 20 feet above her car, and the art supplies in the back — gallons of turpentine — were fueling the fire. Her car door was jammed shut. As she began to lose hope, a stranger kicked in her window to help her escape.

Massari spent 40 days in the hospital burn unit to treat the second- and third-degree burns covering half of her body. The relentless pain, she said, kept her from sleeping more than a few minutes

at a time. “I was literally saying, ‘How am I going to get through the next second?’” Massari said. “I felt deeply betrayed by life.”

Years of grueling physical therapy were accompanied by extreme depression, despair and anxiety for Massari. Yet, she calls this time a “profound journey” that took her on an adventure to find peace and happiness in spite of her suffering.

Something deeper than externally dependent happiness — brought by love, adrenaline or material things — is available to us, she told attendees. Massari sought happiness that is self-generating in endless supply.

This type of happiness can co-exist with devastation, she explained. “Pain will always be a part of our lives,” Massari said. “Embracing this idea is the foundation for building a peaceful life.”

When she was in the hospital, Massari was in constant pain, but worked to build a mountain of joy to overcome it. She began a search to find the man who had saved her life. The man she found, Roger Pepper, told her it was *she* who saved *him*. He had recently lost his wife to cancer and didn’t want to live without her.

“What amazes me,” Massari said, “is that two people in their deepest moment of pain met in the middle of a blazing fire and saved each other.”

Massari went on to create the Roger Pepper Adventure Camps for teenagers with severe burn injuries.

“Our happiness is born in our courage to see all that is beautiful and good,” she said, “and all that is painful and unfair — and choosing compassion, kindness and love, anyway.” ■