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HOST: Anger is one of those emotions that transcends age, race, and political affiliation. Everyone is angry. Feeling trapped in a global pandemic will do that to you. But we can get so caught up in expressing our anger. To balance that, maybe our optimism has to be outrageous. Almost unreasonable... because the bad things in our lives are more reasonable than we know, teaching us lessons we may not see. This is The Conversation Piece. Here's Bif Naked at The Walrus Talks Quality of Life.

BIF NAKED: Hi, I'm Bif Naked, but actually I'm not. I'm actually Beth Torbert. And I was raised by these two outrageous optimists. My parents were many things. They were missionaries. They were my primary role models and, uh, they were healthy, happy, funny, academics, Christians. Although my father did dabble into Gandhi-ism for quite some time and try to impress it upon his three daughters, which I'm the middle. Now, I don't know if you have middle children in your family, but I'm a middle child, which means my job is to torture my older sister to the best of my ability and my little sister to the best of my ability, both which I did successfully. But mostly I just annoyed them with my optimism and I still do it to this day. I drive them crazy. I love optimism. I think that it, solves everything in life and it has helped me, immeasurably through so many different things. As I've grown up in this happy little family, which was very nurturing and wonderful. Uh, I had the chicken pox of course, like every other self-respecting seven-year-old, only I thought it was a blessing in disguise because I got ice cream. So, then I thought I'm onto something here with all of the negative things that can happen in your life or in your health or in your perspective. There's always going to be something good to balance it out. If I'm walking it's because I'm sweating under one arm, and I told everyone, I would confess that to the audience.

What can I tell you? I get to wear sleeveless shirts and show off my tattoos because of hot flashes now. It betrays my age. People say, "you look like a teenager." And I say "Yes, because I still dress like one." That's the key. If you wonder.

Really, it's very hard for me to do seven minutes and I'm going to try very, very hard to stick to it. But I want to tell you that the best day of my life was when my kidney was failing. And this is the true story. I had already had breast cancer and believe me, I never had such a riotous good time in my entire life. then when I was with another bunch of bald women in a room and it got me through. It got me through everything that I could ever have feared about having cancer or any illness. And it was the jokes, the laughter and the community. And we had optimism that we shared and everyone encouraged each other. And then my kidney failed and I thought, Oh, it must be the cancer coming back. Well, this is a wonderful thing that can happen.

Good looking corpse. That was always what we thought. Good looking corpse, you know, find a way to find a silver lining. But, of course, that wasn't what it was. It was an infarct. I know it sounds like a dirty word, but it's not. I promise. I should have probably had a stroke, but because I had a hole in my heart, it went into my kidney instead, so finally they discovered this and after having me in the hospital. Very lucky for me to be at VGH, but morphine is constipating. I don't recommend it. But that's your own choice.

There was a man eventually who came into my room and he was a very attractive doctor who looked like Superman. And I thought that I was hallucinating, of course, and I wasn't dying, but wanting very badly to live. And he said, "I wake up every day of my life. And all I want to do is fill holes." And I looked at him and went, "Wow, Are you gonna fill mine?"



And he said, yes, I am. And I thought, this is the greatest day of my life. Eventually what transpired was this wonderful cardiologist was optimistic about my little hole in my heart and thought, let's fill it with a little mesh umbrella just to break it down for you. So, we went into the operating room and they said, we're going to keep you awake for this procedure. And I thought, this is amazing. Can you imagine you get to stay awake when they crack your ribs open. But, of course they don't do that. They make a little incision and they put some type of numbing agent that feels like Novocaine into your groin so that they can thread a catheter and a camera and a wire and all manner of speakers who knows what they're doing up into your heart so that they can do the umbrella.

And it was the best experience of my life. I couldn't believe it. I thought breast cancer was quite remarkable. It was a tremendous experience, but this is the greatest thing that's ever happened to me. And they put a material, a freezing material into your groin. And if you might've to the dentist in your life, you'll know that when they give you a needle in your jaw, it aches, there's a heaviness. There's a molecular heaviness to that material. It's the same thing they're doing here. So, of course I say to the nurses, "Oh, it feels like my dentist is between my legs."

I don't know if they laughed, but they continued their work. William Shatner's music played over the speakers and they spoke in kind of quiet tones while they did their work. And as he worked on my heart, my whole heartbeat was rewritten. And I went and I started breathing. I thought, Oh my God, if I live through this, God, I'm going to clean my car. And the second thing I'm going to do is I'm going to change dentists (because I was too embarrassed). But you know, it was really the best thing - I wish I could do it every day. And I think that if you had your own heart surgery, I'd like to do yours for you instead. I wish I could be that surrogate patient. And I think that I will live that way every day of my life with an outrageous optimism that my parents instilled in me. I hope you have the same.

HOST: Bif Naked is a Canadian songwriter and motivational speaker, and she's not the only one to have graced The Walrus Talks stage. Our YouTube channel is the place to find over 800 speakers at The Walrus Talks. We're also coming up with a plan to bring The Walrus Talks to you at home. Until then, sign up to our weekly newsletters to stay in touch. At [thewalrus.ca/newsletters](http://thewalrus.ca/newsletters).