

Find Your Passion

Christania Mendez

BEFORE YOU READ: Do you have a passion or a hobby? How does it help your mental health?

A Hard Start

Growing up, I had lots of love in my life, but one thing was lacking: a “good environment.” I was raised by a mother who struggled to shoulder all the responsibilities of parenthood by herself. My father abandoned her while she was pregnant with me. Without any financial support and little guidance, I faced many obstacles and learned to do without many material things. But what I wanted most was my father’s love!

My father lived nearby, but refused to take care of me. To make matters worse, my mom got married and left me with my extended family to start a new life. I felt so sad and alone that I cried myself to sleep at night.

Although her occasional visits helped relieve that void, there were still many wounds festering inside of me. I felt low self-esteem and depres-



Look up the lyrics and listen to Whitney Houston’s song, “The Greatest Love of All.” What is the greatest love of all, according to Houston? How does the song make you feel? Photo from pxhere.com.



sion. I became very hostile with everyone around me, because I was mad as hell with the world and everything in it. With no father to love me, and no mother to regularly nurture me, I felt like an orphan. I often wondered, “What’s wrong with me?”

Despite my environment, I found ways to cope, including getting involved in school activities.

Music Lifts Me Up

One of these activities was the choir, where we entered a lot of contests and I learned to play the piano.

Music helped my mental healing and gave me the power to change my mood. As a good exercise for my mind, body and soul, it helped me to release some of my stress and depression. It allowed me to escape from reality and gave me the chance to feel joy and happiness. I used to spend my days feeling sorry for myself, but music filled me with laughter and dancing.

Music saved me and helped me become brave enough to finally make peace with and talk about my past. Everyone can be empowered by all kinds of music, such as gospel, reggae, jazz, and classical. Each artist has something to teach from their powerful words and notes. Bob Marley’s “One Love” and “No Woman, No Cry” healed me and Whitney Houston’s “Greatest Love of All” reminded me how to love myself.

Eating Well Brings Me Joy

Eating well can improve your mental and physical health. Poor nutrition can cause certain conditions, like diabetes and heart disease. During this pandemic, I have changed my diet. I am now more aware of the importance of a healthy immune system with regards to fighting disease and viruses. Eating properly has become one of my passions.

My motivation for changing my diet comes from understanding the ailments that affect older people. Both my parents have hereditary diseases: my mom is diabetic and my dad had high blood pressure and heart disease and died very young. To avoid this fate, I use less salt; instead of sugar, I use honey. I also have started eating lean pro-



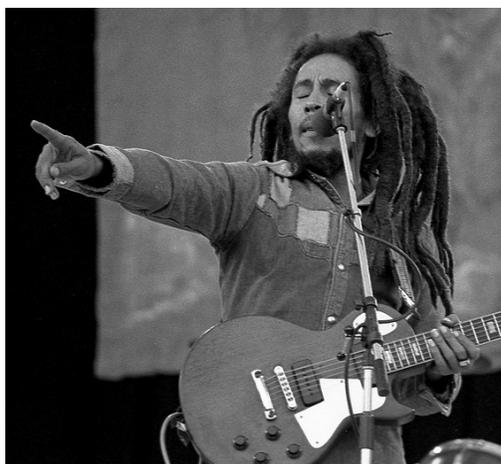
How does food affect your mood?

tein, such as seafood and chicken. Moreover, I include lots of vegetables, like broccoli and spinach, and I have made juicing a part of my regimen.

Once I made these changes, I noticed I was happier and more focused with a lot more energy. Now, I enjoy preparing healthy meals, since eating healthy is another way to support my mental health.

One Breath, One Song, One Meal at a Time

Music and healthy food help me feel at peace with myself. The future is not certain and I cannot control everything around me, so I control what I can by eating right and relying on my music to lift me up. These actions keep me positive. I will take life one breath, one song, and one meal at a time!



Look up the lyrics and listen to Bob Marley’s “One Love.” How does the song make you feel?
Photo by Eddie Mallin from [wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bob_Marley_playing_guitar.jpg).

Christiana Mendez is a student at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center in New York City. I am a blood donor and an animal lover, who enjoys singing, dancing, cooking and listening to music. Last but not least, I want say thanks to The Change Agent and my teacher Ms. Redd for this opportunity.

