



# JOURNEY TO WELLNESS GUIDEBOOK

*31 days to recovery and healing the body, spirit and mind after life  
altering surgery*

Nina Louise

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hello

Hello readers, my name is Nina. I wrote this E-book to help those recovering from surgery and those who feel their voice is not heard when seeking treatment. I spent five weeks in and out of the hospital from July to August 2022 and I have been recovering ever since. I received my master's degree in English at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. I have been in the industry of storytelling for the last ten years.

By the end of this book I hope you feel you have the right to advocate for your health and wellbeing. I believe you deserve the right to a second and third opinion.

You can choose the path of your own destiny and here is how I choose mine.

*Nina Louise*



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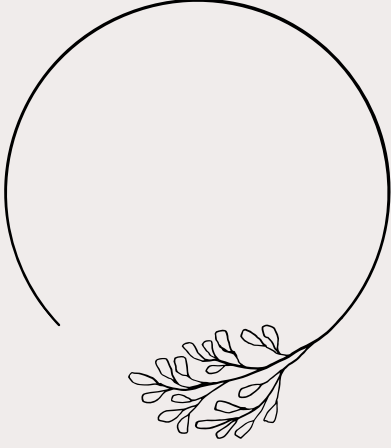
When the nightmare begins: the hospital stays.

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## July 17th—A New Beginning

In a nutshell, let me tell you how I spent my summer. I missed people. The outfits and watching people were the things I missed the most. I was vaccinated. I was boosted, and even without a mask, I was positive I was safe.

People are still dying of COVID-19.

I spent 31 days infested with Covid symptoms, resulting in four surgeries, a left leg full of blood clots and the reality that my life may never be the same. No more 5k's or half marathons, limited traveling and life as a woman whose body would never look or feel the same again.

My 31 days and beyond recovery will not be all about Covid. I blame no one but myself for not masking up when I took a summer job at a very popular Waikiki restaurant. I knew better. You can't trust others with your health, sometimes not even the doctors or nurses watching over you know what's best for you. You know your own BODY.



# Day One: July 17th, 2022

This morning I woke up with a side pain that kept me up most of the night.

Somehow, during the night I managed to fall asleep but not for long. I was up around six and knew this pain in my side may send me to the ER. In my head, I went over so many reasons why I should not go. The pain would go away, I told myself. I took Aleve and Advil hours later and I slept. Slept most of the morning and afternoon. The day flew by. The pain continued. I barely ate and I could think of nothing else other than I think my appendicitis is exploding inside me.

I spoke to everyone I knew through texts and calls. When I walked I was doubled over. I had to go to the ER. I had put it off long enough. It was after 6 p.m. Why had I waited so long? I kept thinking it was not that bad. I could heal it with medicine. I called a Lyft and ten minutes later I found myself waiting along with a few others in the Queen's Emma Clinic emergency room. The good news, because of COVID-19 we were spread out from outdoors entry sign-in to indoors, "Wait here and doctor will see you soon."

I could not remember the last time I was in an ER. I spent most of my childhood free of hospitals except for a few occasions. My youth was the same. I visited my first ER a few years ago when after going for a bike ride to the campus gym for a swim, I felt a sprain in my left foot. I could still walk and with a quick massage, I thought I was ok.



# Day One: July 17th, 2022

I swam and biked home, but the next day, I could barely walk and hours later I found myself inside the campus doctors office. Long story short, he handed me a bag of Advil and said return if the pain does not go away.

He insisted it could not be a blood clot because I had no symptoms other than a warm spot on the back of my calf.

I returned five days later.

Sometimes life really is like a box of chocolates.





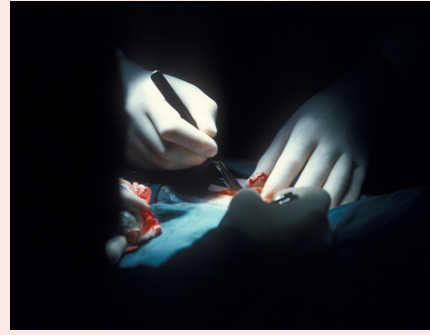
# Day Two: Dawn of July 18th

Before I dive into how to handle tough decisions like having major surgery and who do you call when no one is up at midnight, let me quickly give you the rundown of how the evening went once I arrived in the ER. I am not usually a procrastinator, but when it comes to my health, I am convinced God will step in and take over. This is why I suffered in pain all day and waited until 7 pm to call a Lyft to carry me three blocks to Queen's Emma Clinics.

As a avid television watcher and someone who has many hobbies and one of those is writing screenplays and scripts, I was sure I would walk into a scene straight from the television show ER. I did not. After all, in the hospital, Covid is alive and well and unfortunately, still taking lives. Even though I was masked when I arrived, after checking in, they issued me a hospital mask. I will say it felt like it worked a lot better than the half dozen that I own. Along with three others I waited to be seen, it took only an hour. I waited another hour, almost two before they came out to me and addressed the issue. I could get my appendix removed or take medicine. I opted for the surgery, a decision I regret now and soon I will share with you why.

I shared a bed with three others in need of medical attention. It was after 11 pm and there was no one to call for advice. What do you do when this happens? How do you get a second opinion when you only have seconds to make a decision? What I should have done is take the medication option until I could count out the need for a hysterectomy.





I knew I had fibroids for years. I had no idea how large they had become and that they were pushing on my other organs.

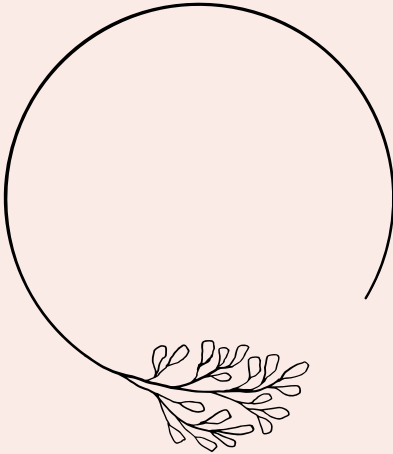
I was wheeled into pre-op just after midnight. The urgency of the situation should have told me that I had no other choice, that the surgery was the right decision, still, I wonder.

By 1 am I was in surgery getting my appendix removed. Two hours later the nurses woke me, called my name, checked my vitals, and informed me they would be releasing me by 6 am. Despite having Covid. Simply put, there were no more Covid beds. However, because of my history with Blood clots (DVT), I thought they would have thought otherwise. They did not.

I was woken again at 6:15 am. “Is anyone here to take you home?”  
“No. I live alone and have no family here.”

No Ubers or Lyfts allowed. They called for a medical taxi. I waited another two hours for the pharmacy to release my medications. The fact that they were concerned about sending me home alone was touching to me, but they never offered to find a bed, if they had, I wonder if I would still be healing from a DVT now, nearly two months after the appendectomy.

What can you do to make sure the right decisions are made? Reach out to someone, anyone and yes, if you have to, get a second opinion. In my case, I had a matter of hours, maybe a day or two, but who knows what OBGYN would have said if I was able to see them or a specialist the next day.



# Quiet THE MIND

When you move somewhere and you have no family or good friends to rely on. Seek out options. Churches, organizations, school groups and staff, whatever you do, find a buddy system. Who can bring you food, underwear, your computer or anything else you urgently need if you are on bed rest.

Once home, I slept in two hour intervals. I barely ate. But I drank everything in sight. Orange juice saved me. This would be my routine for the next three days, until I felt a warm sensation on the back of my calf. Not again, was on repeat in my head for the next three days before I returned to the ER.

The world for singles, old and young, can be a lonely road, but it does not have to be. Find the help you need and you will be happy you did.

Resources for the single survivors:

<https://www.mcjr.com/blog/recovery-from-surgery-when-you-live-alone>

See your healthcare provider for more options.



# The Pre-Surgery - Post Surgery checklist

What can you do before surgery to ensure a smooth recovery?

Who can you ask for help if you have no friends or family close by?

Make a list of everything you need before and after surgery down below:

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## Day Three Through Six

I should have been packing my clothes and leaving my apartment along with a semester of school behind for five months, traveling to Japan and Korea.

Always be prepared to have your life plans spin you in another direction. Where am I headed? Even now I do not know. What I know is I can tackle this interruption head on with a great attitude and smile.

What do you do when you are in your early stages of recovery?

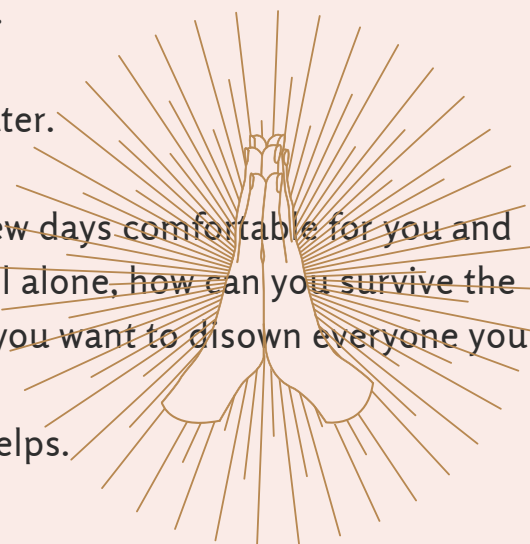
Who do you call when you need groceries? When you want McDonald's? This is not the day and age of family and friends coming to the rescue.

In those first few days, I was very thankful for family and friends who sent me groceries via Safeway delivery option. They deliver? Who knew? Everyone but me. Do not ignore the plethora of options via a fee and tip, like Door Dash, UberEATS and other services who can deliver to you when you have no one else.

More on this later.

How can you make recovery in those first few days comfortable for you and those around you or in my case if you are all alone, how can you survive the loneliness and not let it eat at you so much you want to disown everyone you know?

Prayer always helps.





I Write a journal. Keep a diary of your feeling and how those feelings are affecting your body and mind. Find fun things to watch. Fun and exciting things to do if you can physically do them.

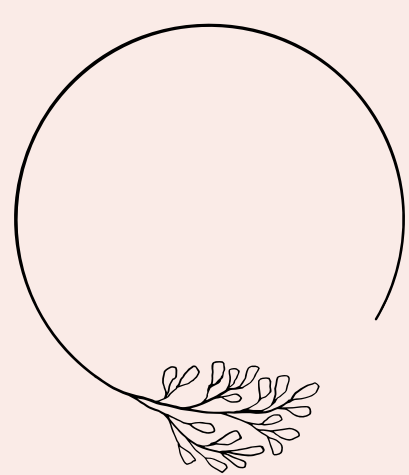
I was not. Tired from the appendectomy, I slept every two-three hours. When I rose, I walked the length of my junior one-bedroom apartment, ate only fruit and drank everything I could get my hands on.

I binged comedies. Thank you, Kevin Hart and Sandra Bullock. By Wednesday, my appetite was back and so was a warm sensation in my calf. The feeling was familiar. Three years ago, I experienced my first DVT (Deep Vein Thrombosis), also known as a blood clot, days after an injuring my foot on a bike ride. I tried to sleep less and walk around more, but I realize now the damage was done.

What I should have done was reach out to my doctor in California. I was living in Hawaii attending a PhD program, and get her opinion. I did not. If I had, I might have saved myself days if not weeks of recovery as the clots would not have had the time to spread.

There was no one I could reach out to on a personal level for advice. The only person who had a history with blood clots died 23 years ago, my mother. Loneliness rears its ugly head.

I say this only because if someone else was around watching me wobble back and forth, they would have insisted I return to the emergency room a lot sooner than I did. So, God stepped in.



**JUST  
KEEP  
MOVING  
FORWARD**

How? My professor from The University of Hawaii at Manoa stopped by when she heard about the surgery. She asked if anyone was available to assist me. When I told her I was healing solo, we both blamed it on the 'COVID effect.'

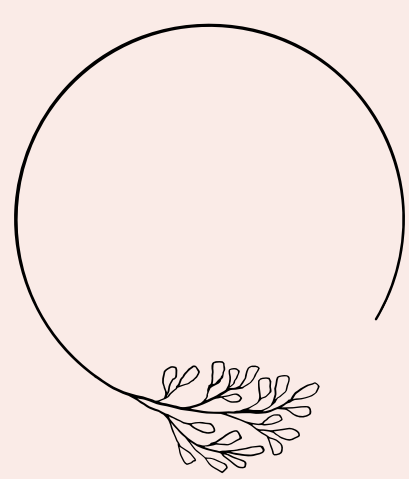
It was Thursday, four days after my surgery, when she dropped off a gallon of Green Tea and a pack of sparkling soda. My former professor was kind and very thoughtful. She had just buried her step-father and her mother had been ill all summer.

I shifted my weight, and she knew something was wrong with my leg. Immediately she suggested I return to the ER. Complications from surgery can be worse than the surgery itself.

I waited two more days. I am not entirely sure why. It might not be another DVT. Wishful thinking. A part of me thought God would step in and perform a miracle. Another blood clot meant more medicine and less mobility. Even worse, it meant I could not fly.

I could not go to Okinawa as planned in nine days. My last visit to see my niece and nephew was in 2018. My plans for the remainder of the summer and most likely the rest of the year would change entirely.

On Saturday, I returned to the ER.



They confirmed the DVT in a matter of hours. The doctor apologized for not taking my history with blood clots or the fact that I had tested positive for Covid-19 on the eve of the surgery into consideration when releasing me so soon after surgery.

Should they have kept me for observation? Obviously, but I should have fought for a bed and my right to a healthy body. I knew a blood clot was possible too. I placed no blame on him or anyone else but myself for not speaking up for what I deserve. My right to full medical health care.

The health care journey had begun. Before the week was over, I returned to the ER. The leg would look like nothing I had ever seen before.

And more surgeries would begins...



## *How to Tell if You are Healing or Not*



Well now, as you know, a good sign that you are recovering and doing well is if you have passed gas in 24 hours after your surgery. Your normal bodily functions have to return or otherwise there could be more complications and it could slow your healing.

My healing from the DVT was slow. Even the doctors did not know why the swelling had not gone down. Not even a little bit. They were concerned and I could tell.

The doctors, the attending physician and my hematologist had determined I was ready for my big surgery: the hysterectomy. It was scheduled for Monday, August 8th. The only reason I remember this is because my sister-in-law's birthday is on August 8th. I thought this would definitely be a bad day to die.

Anyday, at 54 would be a bad day to die.

The next day, I felt better, but not healed. Health-wise, I was fine. I could think on my own, I could breathe, and I had an appetite. When I got up to go to the bathroom, it reminded me that I was not okay. The leg felt like and looked like an inflated balloon. When I stood for too long, I could feel pain. This pain was not going away.





After another day of salty pizza with too much sauce and not enough cheese and lots of fruit, they said I was ready for the hysterectomy.

Those days all blend together. I slept a lot, but never felt rested. I blamed the new techno beds and the pads they kept under my bottom just in case.

“Just in case of what?” I asked.

“In case you bleed. Or you can’t make it and have an accident.”

I looked at her like she was crazy and insisted she take it off. “It keeps me from getting any rest,” I nagged.

She did as I asked, and not even a day later; I had an accident. I stopped wearing my undies and just let it all hang out. She was miffed, and I was mad, but they never forced that bottom cover on me again.

### *Lose Your Vanity*

In the hospital, you have no other choice. Your butt is just there for all the world to see. Lucky for me, I never lost my strength in my arms and I could hold the gown closed 99% of the time. I walked myself to the bathroom every chance I could, and even managed to brush my own teeth every once in a while.

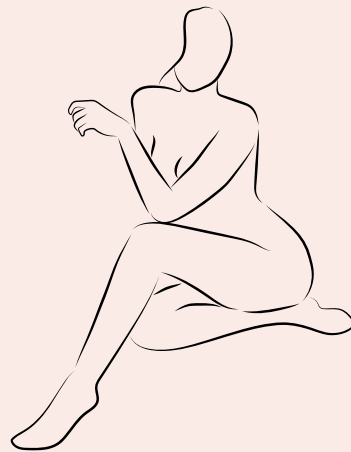
# TRUST \* the \* PROCESS



I wiped my body down daily and when they offered; I turned them down letting them know I had done it already. They only had to wash me down twice, both times before surgery. My huge regret, my hair. I wish I would have invested in some leave-in conditioner and gel because when I say my hair was a HOT MESS; I mean it. It was near the end of the second week and days before going home that I was able to stand on my foot long enough to wet my hair and throw it in a ponytail. Lord, I looked rough.

Lesson learned: if you can't take it with you, deal with what you have, make it work. This is only temporary. Or at least, that's what I told myself.

What did this hospital stint teach me? I could go a day or two without a shower and not kill anyone. I could go a day or two without conditioning my hair and not kill myself. And I am not as strong as a woman as I think I am if I can't go commando when needed.



## 2 Easy Ways to Relieve Stress



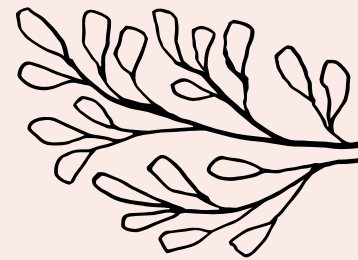
### Mindfulness Yoga Style

Yoga was the key element I was missing in the hospital and once I got out. After the swelling in my leg decreased, I practiced with a Yoga app that helped me move slowly and increase my strength with time.



### Wellness Walking Style

I have always been into walking and running. After the surgeries, I had to take it slow. I still do. Walking is a great stress reliever and a wonder time to focus on yourself, your goals and your dreams. Music soothes the soul. Get your walk on!



Shoulda, coulda, woulda. These are the things and the choices that sit with us. I will not lie. I put all my faith in God to see me through this journey. He did. But not in the way I expected or hoped. Sometimes that is just what we have to do, hope for the best, and pray for the rest.

### Do Not Look Back with Regret

Looking back, I should have spoken with my primary about other options other than a hysterectomy, if there were any. My first thought was to wait on the surgery, despite everything was a good one. I would not have survived my first year in the PhD program at Manoa otherwise. And though I have no intention of returning to a PhD program anytime soon, I now realize with the side effects that come with losing your female organs, I would not have lasted through the fall semester.

And I am grateful for the year I had at Manoa. I met some great people and started wonderful writing projects that I always wanted to dive into and finish. It is still hard to concentrate for long periods of time. So, my writing projects are still waiting for me, but I have them on my radar. I am making time for myself and my dreams



# The Wellness Worksheet Page

Keep track of how you are feeling. Journaling is great for putting everything in perspective.

Write down what you have to do today, and what you want to do today. Pick at least one from each list.

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How do you feel physically, mentally and spiritually? Write the pros and cons.

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Who can you reach out to for advice? Comfort? Companionship?  
Go ahead, call someone, anyone, just for chit chat time.

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# The Mindfulness Challenge Day Two

Find your innermost self

Plan to conquer goals!

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# The Mindfulness Challenge Day Three

Find your innermost self

Write a story where you are the hero!

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# thank you

*I am so excited that you took the time to read my E-book in hopes of learning something new, or at the very least, discovering it is okay to advocate for your own health and your happiness.*

*I wish you the best of luck in discovering ways to uncover a healthier and happier you. The resources and tools are out there. Search. Ask. Realize your truth and live it.*

*Happiness is calling!*



## **Contact:**

[www.ninalouise.net](http://www.ninalouise.net)  
[ninalouise49@gmail.com](mailto:ninalouise49@gmail.com)