



## An Interview with Joan Lunden

*Many of us first met Joan Lunden during her tenure as host of ABC's Good Morning America (1980-1997). But Joan is also a best-selling author (her books include Wake-Up Calls, A Bend In The Road Is Not The End Of The Road, Joan Lunden's Healthy Living, Joan Lunden's Healthy Cooking, Mother's Minutes, Your Newborn Baby, Growing Up Healthy: Protecting Your Child From Diseases Now Through Adulthood, and Good Morning I'm Joan Lunden). Joan is also host of the successful exercise video Workout America, a motivational speaker and a mother of four children.*

*Joan sat down with Editor-In-Chief Gary Barg to discuss the importance of positive thinking for family caregivers.*

**Gary Barg:** As a family caregiver, I have to thank you for your message of the importance of positive attitudes. One of your quotes that I really like is, "We can't stop changes from occurring, but we can control how we react to them." What an important lesson for family caregivers.

**Joan Lunden:** The most important thing to understand is the concept that we actually have the ability to not react, and I truly believe that most people don't think that way. People think that when something happens, they must react in a fashion that then determines the outcome, and that's not really how the process has to be. We can make a conscious decision not to react. And when you make that discovery – and it really is like a discovery – it's like discovering a gold mine. When you make that discovery, you can, all of a sudden, not react to things that your children do, or things that your partner, your spouse, or coworker may do. Think of when someone has said something to you, even a total stranger, and it has set the tone for a whole day; it has, in the words of so many people, "ruined my day." You don't need to let anything or anybody "ruin" your day when you realize you have the ability not to take that downward spiral. You'll find yourself reacting to things throughout your day, but then saying, "Wait a second, I'm not going there. I'm just not going there." It can not only give you a huge change in the way you live your life, or whether you have a good day or bad day, but I also think that it has an amazing impact on your stress level, and ultimately, on your health.

**GB:** It has an impact on your health and on your ability to care for your loved ones.

**JL:** Yes and the ability to care for your loved one, because when you start to understand what your partner, your children, or the other people in your own life are doing for their own reasons, it allows you to understand that they are reacting as well. Jonathan Cabbott Zen wrote the book "Wherever You Go, There You Are," and the whole idea behind the book is that we see things through the glasses we choose to put on. It's just a wonderful concept because you realize that you can put a different set of glasses on. My mother always said to me when I was growing up, "Always have your rose colored glasses on." She was one of these "the glass is half-full" people and the ultimate positive thinker, and some of it must have sunk in. However, it wasn't until later in life that I started my own kind of journey into meditation and into a different way of looking at things, and started reading about it, discovering authors like Jonathan Cabbott Zen, that I was finally saying, "Oh yeah, that's

what my mother was talking about.”

**GB:** It really is important to caregivers to think like this, because we’re always looking for the next piece of bad news, or we’re constantly placed in a reactionary mood.

**JL:** The world that we live in these days makes you feel so overwhelmed with all the things you’ve got to keep up with, or catch up with, and all of a sudden to discover that you have the ability to make such a positive impact upon people’s lives, and that you actually have a lot more power than you think changes you, whether it’s emotional (how you react to things), or whether it’s your ability to impact on them physically.

**GB:** For example, you want to be sure that your kids establish a healthy lifestyle from the start...

**JL:** Yes, when I was working with a pediatric nutritionist, Dr. Myron Winnick. He based his life-long studies and body of work on how we feed our children and how early nutrition will impact them when they are adults. If somebody said to you that they had an inoculation or a pill that you could give your child that would prevent them from getting any debilitating diseases such as adult diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure or coronary artery disease, and it would extend their lives by 10 to 15 years, you would say “sign me up,” and “where do I get in line?” As parents, we actually do have that ability to impact our children’s health, but the problem is that so many people don’t take their own health seriously, because they don’t exercise, don’t eat right, and eat too much fast food and foods with trans fats.

**GB:** That’s one reason why I like the American Heart Association’s “Choose to Move” program. It is proactive, and it allows people to take whatever time they can during the day to care for themselves.

**JL:** We know that women primarily make the decisions at the grocery store. They are the ones who cook the food and serve the meals. An organization like American Heart Association understands that you’ve got to focus on these women. You have to try to help them raise their awareness about cardiovascular disease, and how much we have in our own control. Thirty percent or so is due to our genetics and there’s nothing you can really do about that, other than be aware of it, but seventy percent is within our control. How much more empowered do you want to be than that? You can have a significant impact on the outcome of your life, how long you live, and whether your years will be fun-filled and healthy.

**GB:** How does this program work?

**JL:** It’s a free program and people can go to [choosetomove.org](http://choosetomove.org) Choose to Move is really smart in taking a realistic approach, asking “What are people going to be able to put into their lives without having to make significant changes?” If you tell someone that they’ve got to join some huge exercise program, you’re going to lose them. You’re going to lose seventy-five percent of them within the first couple of weeks. They are just never going to do it, so the American Heart Association took the approach that they would find things that would be much more realistic for people to do. If we can just be their inspiration and they follow some of the suggestions about incorporating physical fitness, shopping wisely and eating more healthy foods, after only 12 weeks, I’m really convinced that they are going to feel better. Anyone who has said that they didn’t have the energy to workout, finds out that after doing so, they have so much more energy. I think that when you come back from exercising, it gives you more patience, and makes you much more relaxed as a caregiver.

**GB:** Have you been successful in communicating the message to caregivers who need the program?

**JL:** Whenever I talk to a women's group, I tell them that if they make this investment in themselves, it will determine the quality of their lives, five years from now or even 10 years from now. They will find that they'll be a better mom, a better partner, a better coworker and a better friend, because they are going to be happier, more relaxed and have more energy. It's funny, but at 39-years-of-age, I was the woman I now preach to; I was 45 pounds overweight, never exercised and ate terribly. My wake-up call, ironically enough, was sitting on the set of Good Morning America and interviewing a representative of the American Heart Association. Their representative was giving our viewers a 10-question quiz as to their risk of cardiovascular disease, and as I was listening to the questions, I realized that I had just flunked that test. It was like a light bulb going off in my head, and I really wanted to take this seriously. I didn't want to be watching the race, I wanted to be running in the race and thank God I did, because here I am now, in my 50s with two sets of twins under the age of two! I guarantee you that I am much healthier today than I was at 35 years-of-age. I know by making that commitment to myself, I've added years to my life and that I've made a huge impact on my family.

**GB:** As caregivers, we tend to take ourselves out of the circle of care; making sure that our loved ones have everything they need, but ignoring our own needs. So it seems as if the road to becoming a better caregiver begins with taking better care of you.

**JL:** It's just by nature that woman are caregivers, with everyone on these gigantic "to do" lists, your kids, your spouse, your boss, everybody but you. If you are able to cross ten things off of the list, the item called 'taking care of you,' will end up being one of those things that will float to yet another list. The truth is if we took better care of ourselves, then we'd be much more capable of attacking everything on our lists.

To hear entire interview go to  
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