

Pain Free at Last: A Story of Perseverance and Hope

Back in the winter of 2001 I had severe stomach pains that put me in the emergency room. The doctors ran several tests and couldn't find anything wrong. I spent the next 6 years with recurring stomach pain and had a ton of tests all coming up with nothing. These pains would sometimes come out of nowhere and last for several hours. I remember at times being doubled over on the floor at work or in a department store and not being able to move the pain was so severe.

In the spring of 2007, my primary care doctor recommended me to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. I spent 10 days in Rochester and met with several wonderful and caring doctors and had several more tests performed. The final diagnosis was "more than likely she has musculoskeletal abdominal wall pain". Although my experience at Mayo was extremely positive, my diagnosis, or lack thereof, was disappointing. I had a follow up appointment with my doctor when I returned and I became very emotional in his office out of frustration. He put me on tranquilizers and recommended I talk to a professional. Within a week, the pain had subsided. I started changing my diet back to normal foods which I had all but given up for a diet of dry cereal, oatmeal and liquid drinks and felt my life coming back. I only went to the therapist a hand full of times since it seemed very impersonal and formal and going through the process to find a therapist that was a "match" seemed overwhelming and very time consuming.

Over the next year or so, every once in a while the pain would flare up and I would take my tranquilizers for a day or so and things would calm down. Then in the fall of 2009, without any warning, I started having severe pain when I sat down. Lying down and standing was fine but I couldn't sit without excruciating pain. In my mind, I had less than one and a half years without pain and now I was going through this all over again. I went back to my doctor and we went through the list – did I fall, was I a weekend warrior, etc. I racked my brain and asked my family and others if they remembered me doing something that would cause this much pain. I had a fall in the spring of 2006 and wondered if it was connected. I visited the physical therapist who helped me in 2006 but she said this was completely different. The pain continued and escalated for about 3 years until I was in pain every minute of every day. Again, during this time I saw several doctors and had lots of tests, all coming up with nothing. This time, I also saw three different physical therapists, two chiropractors, one massage therapist and two acupuncturists and although everybody tried their best, nothing took the pain away.

In 2012, I realized I was going through menopause and wondered if any of this was connected to perimenopause so I visited a couple of OBGYNs that specialized in this. One doctor I visited was in NYC. She took the time to talk to me and my husband about my situation and asked

about other medical episodes in my life. I said it would be nice if there was one thing we could find that linked them all so they all finally made sense. I left her office without an answer but with a new thought process and started researching information on the internet.

I'm not exactly sure how but I found a couple of sites on mind body syndrome. I read a couple of books and completed a couple of questionnaires privately and within a few days the pain started subsiding. I had gone back to my childhood and walked forward through my life and found a whole lot of suppressed emotions. I then took a day long road trip with a good friend and we discussed all sorts of topics of mine and she related similar experiences. I started writing what could be labeled as my autobiography; things that happened during my life but were never discussed. I also have a wonderful husband who is a very good listener, so with my children now off to college, we were able to talk at night about these things in more detail and I was able to discuss my feelings about them for the first time.

All the pain didn't go away at once and it still comes back and even stays for periods of time but I now have more awareness of what is causing the pain (I suppress my emotions) and have developed methods that help me alleviate the pain. Looking back, it made a lot of sense. I had been through multiple tests, sometimes more than once, and explored most, if not all known alternative therapies so this "diagnosis" was the only one left. Also, I grew up in a house where emotions were not expressed except for anger. You were expected to "keep your chin up" and do what you have to do.

Several healthcare professionals mentioned stress to me as I was going through both periods of pain but it didn't make sense since stress is not the right word to describe what this is. Maybe if they had asked about any life events that happened in the past that maybe I didn't fully work through or resolve that might have made sense. I can't say for sure if I would have agreed to this at the time but it would have been more accurate and started the conversation in the right direction.

Along this journey I've met several people who came up to me to tell me about their back pain or other pains they were having. One was a grandmother that lost her grandchild a while ago and said she had back pain that wouldn't go away and didn't seem to have a cause according to the doctors. Another is a veteran who was close to losing her family because she would not talk to anyone or admit she needs to. However, a lot of people are also like me and have not gone through a traumatic experience like those above or those who have experienced abuse or poverty or even divorce so the thought of the pain being caused by life events and how they dealt with these events doesn't make sense as it didn't to me at first either. I've tried to help these people by telling them my story and how I became pain free but their eyes seem to gloss over with confusion. Therefore, I recently created a web site that I hope will help others

relieve undiagnosed pain before it takes away 10+ years of their life. <http://www.pain-management-therapy.com/>

I don't believe everyone with pain will be helped by a process similar to what I did but I do believe if someone has explored all medical options and still has constant, persistent pain, a program like this may be able to help. I believe I went through this for a reason and I need to try to help others. If you would like to help me start a program to help others in a similar situation, please use the contact information below to get in touch.

Lori Ferro is just an ordinary citizen with a passion to help others and can be reached at ljferro@comcast.net.