

MY JOURNEY WITH FIBROMYALGIA

Relief

That was my first reaction when i was diagnosed at the age of 16 with Fibromyalgia. After almost a year of going from specialist to psychologist to specialist, I finally had a label, a name for what I was feeling, a reference for others to use to better understand what I was dealing with and ultimately my limitations.

Short Honeymoon

The discouraging news that there was no known cause and therefore no cure, combined with the realization that I could no longer pursue a professional career in dance brought the honeymoon to a quick end. Craving more information about my body and ultimately how it is supposed to function under healthy conditions, I began a journey that I still consider myself on today.

Taking Action

Frustrated by the feeling of helplessness I'd experienced time and again in each doctor's office, with every specialist I'd seen, depending on them to tell me what was going on in my own body, I decided to major in Exercise Physiology. I studied the body and used my own as a guinea pig. I tried to clean out my diet, get on a regular sleep schedule, and add some regular physical activity to my life. I gave up meat in an effort to cut out any possible variables caused by how they were bred, or fed, or vaccinated and I gave up all medications that I had been prescribed. I could notice a change pretty quickly. Overall, I felt a bit lighter, fewer headaches, but the pain remained.

Dream Body

I had a wonderful teacher for my Psychology of the Body class at Sonoma State University, who assigned us a project she called the 'dream body'. It was a project to help us understand the psychosomatic connection, how our mind affects our body and vice versa. We had to buy a piece of butcher paper, have a friend trace our body outline onto it, and then fill it in with whatever each area inspired. We were supposed to meditate on each part of the body and decorate the butcher paper with whatever came to mind. We could use pictures, color pencils, paint, really whatever we needed to recreate the visual equal to our thought/feeling about that particular area. I got my butcher paper, had my friend trace me, but every time I tried to focus on a body part I just felt pain. I hated the project because every time I sat down to do it I wound up feeling incredibly depressed. I had such negative feelings and images about my body, I didn't want to draw it or "sit" with it in meditation. We had a month to complete the project, I wound up doing it all the night before. My dream body looked like a nightmare.

A Guy From Class

One day after sharing about my chronic pain in class, a guy asked if I'd ever tried Taoist Healing, I said that I hadn't, he offered to work with me if I was interested, I said sure. The

first time he worked with me he pulled out a calendar and asked me to circle the date that I would be pain-free. I laughed at him then quickly realized he was serious and looked at the calendar. I couldn't do it. He asked what my hesitation was. I told him that I couldn't pick a day, what if it didn't happen by then? I'd be disappointed as I'd been so many times before with other promising 'fixes'. He said that I wouldn't be disappointed again, that I needed to have faith in myself and pick a day to begin living pain-free. I started crying and realized at that moment that I had completely lost myself to this name, to this syndrome that seemed to have endless symptoms and side-symptoms and no end in sight.

Reclaiming My Identity

The first part was needing to label it, needing to know what was wrong, that what I was experiencing was legitimate and had a name that was recognizable to others. That it wasn't all in my head. The second part was the journey to *forget that name so that I could remember my own*. I stopped using the name fibromyalgia. I went on to study stress-reduction, work with a cranio-sacral specialist, play around to find the right balance of physical activity without overdoing it, fine-tuning my diet to support my health, my sleep, my activities, rather than hinder them. I found my dream team of specialists: my acupuncturist, my trainer, a massage therapist. I found postural therapy and pilates and have continued the journey I started back in 2000 to learn about the body, learn from the body, and share the knowledge with others.

Western Medicine and Tunnel Vision

The rise of fibromyalgia in our society, and even its name, has coincided with longer work hours, increased sedentary lifestyles and working conditions, extreme processing and mass production of our food, prescription drug sales skyrocketing, computer and technology becoming an inseparable part of our daily life, stress being a 'normalized' and almost accepted state of existence. The body wasn't meant to function like this. Stress levels alone can alter the body's functions and perceptions of pain, digestive function, sleep disturbances. Add in any number of variables and a multi-system breakdown, which is ultimately what fibromyalgia is, seems inevitable.

Every Day is Another Chance to Change Your Life

There is relief from fibromyalgia. It takes some work and some perseverance but the payoff is well worth the alternative. If I can help one person reclaim their identity, take back their name, their life, I will have come full circle.