

"MS is just a word, not a sentence..." This is my story~

On May 18, 2016 I realized I had lost my sense of taste and smell – it was gone- literally gone. I thought maybe it was because I had an allergic reaction to some nuts I had eaten the previous night. You see, in 2013 I was diagnosed with Chronic Autoimmune Urticaria and had been just adding to my list of triggers that would set me off into a hyper-reactive state. I also realized that the whole left side of my body felt numb. I could feel pressure, but I couldn't really distinguish a rough or soft touch. I consulted Dr. Google, but I really didn't match anything because I didn't fit any of the symptoms – the loss of taste could be an allergic reaction, and I didn't have a pins and needles sensation. My boss & coworker encouraged me to call my real doctor which I did, and the doctor's office was pretty casual about it so I was casual about it and had an appointment with my primary a week later.

I went to work the next week and noticed that my writing was a bit off — just not as fluid but couldn't really pinpoint anything except it seemed "off" and my eyes just didn't seem to want to work together. When I saw the physician's assistant that Thursday, she asked me all the normal questions related to stroke and determined that I didn't have a stroke and not really knowing what to do she checked with the doctor who wanted me to get a brain MRI. So... I made my appointment for the following Wednesday. It was now coming up on the Memorial Day weekend and over the course of the weekend, my vision got worse. I started becoming dizzy, unstable, and started seeing double.

On the Tuesday after the holiday, I returned to work – mind you, it is a crazy busy time for my desk and there were things that had to be done. But when I got to work, I started to cry — I shouldn't have driven, I was having a hard time seeing, my body was numb, I still had no taste and consequently no appetite, and a new symptom—my right (dominant) hand was having a hard time using the mouse – critical to my work load. My boss kindly "asked me to go home" and insisted on a note from a doctor in order to return to work. My MRI was the next day and the doctor wouldn't know anything until the results were returned to him 48 hours later so again, I was following his lead- very casual.

I went to my MRI appointment and afterwards the follow up doctor's appointment. As he read the notes of the MRI he started mentioning things like "lesion, right lobe, swelling, demyelinating disease, MS, palsy, Lyme disease. I was scheduled to see a neurologist for additional testing.

On June 17 ... now a full month of little to no taste, minimal feeling on the left side of my body, double vision and tremors in my right hand I finally saw a neurologist. He showed me the video of my brain and lesions on which were causing my problems. He sent me out with a stack of paperwork about 1/4 of an inch—saying that he wanted to rule out MS and lymphoma. Lymphoma! That wasn't even on my radar — it was the first time I cried. He wanted an urgent MRI of my spine to see if there were more lesions present and an urgent request for lumbar puncture. Those two weeks were a whirlwind. I joked that I was paying people to poke me with needles – whether it be blood, contrast for the MRI of my spinal cord, or the lumbar puncture.

I received a voice mail from the nurse –which I took as good news since everyone knows nurses don't call with bad news—that's the doctor's job. Turns out my Vitamin B test came back low and I just needed to take a B-Complex with B1 and B12. I was thrilled to hear this. Later that day, 4:30 to be exact, I got a call the neurologist directly. Two of my labs came back abnormal -two that were prime indicators of MS. He said that based on those initial tests & his experience, he recommended I get in immediately for three days of an infusion drip of a strong steroid to see if we could lessen the symptoms — but the anticipated long-term prognosis remained — multiple sclerosis. He also advised that I talk to my cardiologist about a maintenance drug to see if it would be a good fit for me. Over the fourth of July holiday weekend, I was “fitted” with a port and I spent a few hours each day in an infusion room. My eye-sight improved, my hand tremors stopped, my feeling and taste came back.

At this point, I had been researching anything I could find on MS and realized there was a whole lot of good news and a whole lot of bad news. One site that stuck out to me was overcomingms.com and its talk about how diet, nutrition, and self-care were critical to managing the symptoms. Armed with what I read, I reached out to Debby Pool, whom I had met 10 years prior while living in Arizona. She jumped right in and together we started working on a plan of modifying my diet to become one of good nutrition and in which I could keep my body in an alkaline state so that it would have time to heal. Additionally, I ordered the Juice Plus trio to add to my vitamin D, vitamin B, and flaxseed oil supplements. I felt like I could do “this.”

About a week after my infusion treatment I returned to the neurologist who began to talk to me about the maintenance drug options. My cardiologist had nixed the recommended drug and it was a blessing in disguise because it was off the table and gave me the confidence to say to the neurologist that I would like the opportunity to manage my symptoms nutritionally. He was NOT happy about this choice, but I asked him, “if it doesn't work, would we see that in the December MRI” and he said yes. So, we agreed that I would try it my way and then have what would be my six-month MRI and go from there.

I slowly morphed into a plant-based diet, reducing things such as cheese, dairy, red meat, and processed foods from my diet. I increased my Juice Plus to 4 of each caplet/day. I was constantly encouraged by Debby who would share stories of others who had overcome their own challenges and it was enough to help me remember that Healthy Self translates to "Heal Thy Self" and that with each bite of food I was either feeding or fighting the disease.

Fast forward to mid-December 2016, now six months after the initial symptoms. I get both a brain and c-spine MRI and go for some additional blood work. I was no sooner out of the MRI appointment when I get a call from the neurologist's office letting me know that they had the results and asking to see me the next day. Of course, it's rarely good news when they call you that quickly and amongst all the emotions, all I could say to myself was “but I feel better.” I arrived at the office a bundle of nerves. The neurologist asked I had seen my report. I said I had not and he gave me a thumbs up and said, “it's good

news.” As he read the report to me, phrases like “improved white matter disease, no new lesions, and my favorite ‘the area of abnormal signal and contrast enhancement... has shown marked improvement, barely discernible at this time.’” What’s even better was the final phrase by the tech that stated that the findings show that disease is responding well to current course of treatment.

So at that appointment, the neurologist asked me if I would like to talk about maintenance meds and I again, told him no, that I would like to continue my plan of nutrition and self-care. He was agreeable, and we made a plan for a six-month follow up.

June 2017, my one-year-after-initial-symptoms- visit was brief but his exact words were, “If I didn’t know you had MS, I wouldn’t think so now.” Again, he asked about maintenance meds and once again, I said, no. At this time, he suggested I look at the research being done on Biotin and MS. I did and now take pharmaceutical grade biotin as part of my nutritional plan. Because things were so status-quo, he did not request an MRI, but scheduled a follow-up appointment in November 2017.

In November 2017, I met once again with the neurologist after insisting on an MRI for the record. He read the report to me... “The brain is unremarkable, no significant white matter disease. No imaging evidence of a demyelinating disorder.” I never knew that my goal in life was to be unremarkable, and here I am and I will take it!!! My neurologist even began to talk to me about additional non-pharmaceutical options. I made it a point to thank him for offering these options.

It’s been interesting to me to see a neurologist who 18 months ago was so upset that I didn’t choose the traditional pharmaceutical route now offer me options that are more in line with how I would like to manage my diagnosis. I’ve since added the Omega Blend to my Juice Plus trio and use the Juice Plus Complete each day in my oatmeal. I strive to maintain a 95/5% plant-based diet and while there has been weight loss (bonus!) what I can see in my then/now pictures is that I look healthy and alive. While I’ve never once denied my diagnosis, what I did do is fight for the opportunity to advocate for my own health on my terms, and thanks to Juice Plus and the support of so many people as well as a good regime of self-care, MS is just a word, not a sentence.

