

Me and My “Happy Pill”



Oh, I remember. In my 20's, losing sight in my right eye, tingling in my hands. In my early 30's, unable to taste food, numbness on my right side. Then at 38, vertigo, numbness from my head to my foot only on my right side, slurred speech. Finally a diagnosis: multiple sclerosis. I couldn't get a disease that was easier to spell?!

I saw one of the best neurologists in New York City who told me that what I had experienced in the past and what I was experiencing now were symptoms of MS. Were there any treatments? Yes. Was I going to inject myself? “No way.”

As time went by and more symptoms kept appearing, my friends and partner suggested I speak to someone, “Who, me? A psychiatrist? I am NOT crazy!” They claimed I was depressed, my reaction continued to be despondent, not speaking but able to throw a pepper at my best friend across the table when I didn't like what she had to say.

Eventually I started seeing a new MS neurologist at an MS clinic closer to home. I had detached myself from conversations and activities; the TV was my new best friend. My friends and partner did not give up trying to convince me that I needed to talk to someone, (even after the pepper incident). The name of a psychologist who worked at the clinic was given to my partner and me. I quickly threw it away, my partner didn't.

Then came my weak spot: beer. A new brewery opened down the street from the MS clinic. My friends said they would take me to the new brewery if I went and talked to the psychologist. I did, and although I tried not to like it, over time I came to realize that with talk and medication, the symptom known as depression could be controlled and the medication

helped me get back in control of my life and change my state of mind. Ultimately, seeing that psychologist was the best move I made, with a little help from my friends.

Me and my “happy pill,” better known as an anti-depressant, are doing well. I still have tingling, numbness on my right side, some cognitive issues, but with the help of my psychologist I was able to learn “tricks” to help me get through my day as a social studies teacher. With her help, I was able to explain to my students what was going on, what MS is, that it is not contagious, and how they could help me. My students and I even started a Walk MS team – Team Amici (which means “friend” in Italian).

If only someone had told me early on that depression was a symptom of MS, just like all the other “strange” things that were happening, I would have sought treatment for it like I did for the numbness and tingling 19 years ago. The “happy pill” has helped me cope, not feel sad, and be part of what is going on at work, with my family and special events. It has given me life back.