

## TRACY: A little help from my friends

By Tracy Hey

My journey with my thyroid was a surprise, an unusual and unexpected event that started in the summer of 2016. But I guess that is life, full of unexpected surprises. When I look back on it, I feel like a flow chart or road map would have been handy. It started with an episode of dizziness, a plugged ear, weird pain in my head (not like a normal headache or migraine), sensitivity to light and noise, and feeling anxious and unbalanced. I went to my family doctor to try and figure out what it was and was sent for a series of blood tests. My B12 and calcium levels came back high, so more blood tests were ordered.

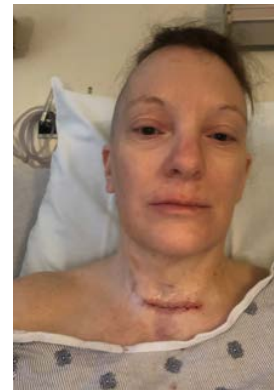
In December of 2016 my lungs caught a virus and I got laryngitis in January. I missed six weeks of work and had a hard time breathing and shaking the virus. Up until this point the only thing that I caught was the common cold and flu. I was healthy, exercising and trying to eat right. My family doctor sent me off to a general medicine doctor. More blood tests were ordered and in February 2017 he discovered that my parathyroid hormone level was high, along with my calcium levels, which were possibly the early stages of hyperparathyroidism. His suggestion was to monitor for six months and if they stayed elevated to refer me to an endocrinologist. This was done and in December of 2017 I went to see an endocrinologist. At my first appointment with her, my face, neck and arms were red, dry, itchy and broken out in a rash. She referred me to a dermatologist. In December of the same year I also saw an ENT doctor for vertigo who said that the “weird episode” was a migraine, again all tests coming back as normal.

In April of 2018 I saw a dermatologist who tested me for lupus, which came back as negative. July of 2018 the dermatologist diagnosed me with cholinergic urticaria. When I sweat, my heart rate goes up and I get hot and I break out in hives and a rash. This would not have been an issue except that I was physically active taking part in about 3 long distance obstacle races a year, biking, hiking, running, boot camps and yoga.

Back to the thyroid story, during January of 2018 I was sent for a bone density scan, ultrasound and parathyroid scan. These tests found that I had a growth on my left parathyroid and thyroid. Another appointment with the endocrinologist and another ultrasound. The January ultrasound had the thyroid growth measuring 6x6 mm and was abnormal in its appearance. In June of 2018 I ended up in the hospital emergency room because I had

an asthma attack. I had exercise-induced asthma but this attack happened on my way home from work. By July 2018 the growth was 8x7 mm. And in September of 2018 I had a biopsy. The biopsy came back as inconclusive but the cells were abnormal and highly suspicious, and maybe cancer. The dreaded C word. So started my mental journey of the unknown and limbo. I already was in the “what is going on with my body” stage. What am I doing wrong? Why am I finding no answers? What did I do wrong? My endocrinologist referred me for surgery for both the parathyroid and thyroid, and as luck would have it, both were on the left side. I had no “normal” symptoms of an ill thyroid or parathyroid. But what is normal? My blood tests came back as normal and according to those results my thyroid was functioning fine. January of 2019, I met with a surgeon who was in agreement that the left thyroid and parathyroid should come out. On February 7, 2019, I had the left side of my thyroid removed.

My biggest challenge was dealing with these medical issues that all of a sudden, over 2 years, came up. I thought that there was something that I did or did not do. I went for all my normal yearly check-ups and did what healthy people were supposed to do. I had been healthy before that, visiting the doctor maybe once or twice a year. And I felt like one thing after another kept happening and there was no answer, or solution. Acceptance of what was going on and trying to figure it out was hard. I had no idea what a thyroid or parathyroid did, or what they were responsible for. Was my parathyroid and thyroid playing a part, or responsible for what was all of a sudden going on? Why was I having asthma attacks driving home in the summer?



Post Op

As of today no one has said yes or no. Where to find reliable information was foreign to me. Googling thyroid and parathyroid growths is not good for anxiety levels. The good thing about the internet is the amount of information available at your fingertips, but the downfall is that not all is reliable. What is reliable and what is not? Hence my first interaction with the Thyroid Foundation of Canada. I was training and racing over 50 km a year. Exercise was my coping skill.

Dealing with the unknown, you may or may not have cancer. What do you do with that? Luckily, I already had a strong support system, sick time, medical coverage, osteopath, massage therapist, naturopath, therapist, chiropractor, a terrific family doctor and specialists, all of whom listened and acknowledged me. But I felt betrayed by my body.

I had to get comfortable advocating for myself, asking questions no matter how silly they seemed. Before my surgery I asked the anaesthesiologist how he knew when he was going to wake me up and what happened if I had to pee during surgery. He smiled and answered my questions and treated them seriously! But I am sure he snickered inside. I had to try and figure out where to find information. Luckily, having professionals already in my life, I could get information from them or at least a starting point. And when I started sharing my story people knew people. Talking, connecting, communicating and reaching out were the best things I did. It helped me deal with the unknown and uncertainty about what was going on in my body. I also had to learn to listen to my body and respect it. If I continued to push and force it, only more damage would be done. My body was shifting and changing to a new "normal". I am learning and exploring different coping skills (meditation, mindfulness, rug hooking, and back to a yoga practice). My career for the last 16 years, answering emergency and non-emergency calls and a police and fire dispatcher - stress, 12 hour shifts and shift work.

The journey continues; as of writing this I still do not know if the growth is cancerous or not. The growth was under 2 cm, so if it is cancer we caught it early. I am learning to rest, relax, and tap into my creativity.

Accepting and embracing how my body has changed. Treating myself with kindness and compassion. If it wasn't for all of this, I would not have tried rug hooking and expanded my people circle! I have had to redefine my definition of healthy and appreciate what my body does for me, because it does a lot! I have many things to appreciate and be grateful for. And this process has been a learning experience, and a learning experience that has allowed me to meet some pretty amazing people. Life is a continuous journey full of surprises, challenges and the unknown, which is a beautiful thing. Embrace it, live and laugh often. Surround yourself with awesome people. Ask questions, communicate and fill up on positive vibes!



Tracy (centre), healing, with a little help from her friends

*Tracy lives near Halifax, Nova Scotia and is planning to hold a Public Education Meeting in the near future.*

## Parlez anglais? - parlez francais?

Are you bilingual? – Do you have thyroid disease or know somebody who does?

Bilingual + Thyroid Disease makes for a good combination to help us with our Patient Help Line.

You could be helping someone who is French speaking, does not speak English and really needs someone to help them get a message to us or a question answered. May take up a few minutes of your time per month but you would be providing a service that could be very helpful!

**We Need your Help !!!      Nous avons besoin de leur appui !!!**

If interested, please contact us at 1-800-267-8822 or by email at: [info@thyroid.ca](mailto:info@thyroid.ca)

