

living with HEPATITIS C

a series of stories written
about people living with
hepatitis C

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On October 2005 I had gone for a pre-op in regards to a catheterization procedure to see if I had any clogged arteries. My heart doctor had mentioned while going through the procedure that I would have a pelvic sonogram done as well because my liver enzymes were elevated on my pre-op blood work. So I decided not to go through the catheterization and to go to a GI.

During my GI visit and more blood tests, my liver enzymes began to get higher and higher. The GI had mentioned it may have to do with a gall stone that might have been stuck in the bile duct. Then one night, while we were having dinner, my doctor calls me and states, “You need to make an appointment to discuss your results which showed that you have hepatitis C.” I

had no clue what hepatitis C was, and I just kept asking the doctor about my gallstones. Did I have to have surgery? The doctor kept saying, “No honey, you tested positive for Hep C.”

I discussed this with my husband, he tells me, “No way, there had to be a mistake.” I’m asking him what the heck Hep C is. I then called my mother-in-law and she said no way that cannot be true. I could not discuss Hep C with my family, we are Italian born and my family – including me – had absolutely no clue. When my husband along with my in-laws discussed hepatitis C and explained it to me, I became very upset and did not understand how this could have happened. I have no tattoos, never did drugs, or shot drugs, and I never had multiple sex partners. Where did this all come from. I was devastated.

I then went to see my GI doctor, who discussed the first steps. I had to go for

a liver biopsy on December 26, 2005 – yes, right after Christmas – so my news during the holidays of me having Hep C was not good news; then came the results and my doctor told me that I needed to begin treatment. I had genotype 1a which is the hardest to treat, but my viral load was low at 308,000, which was a good thing. The doctor did ask me if I was ever sick with flu-like symptoms, and I told him that I had chronic bronchitis and was sick even as a child growing up in Italy. Anyway, I was told I had chronic Hep C and my liver doctor stated from my biopsy that I had Hep C for about 25 years or so. Thank God, my liver showed only moderate to mild fibrosis with grade 2 and stage 2. If I was an alcoholic, I would have been in worse shape.

So in February 06, I began my 48 weeks of treatment. I worked full time and I felt that, working in a very small office of 5 people including myself, I needed to tell my boss and my co-workers. That did not turn out too good for me, but now that I am done with treatment, I have a new outlook on life. I had to go to my doctor's office to be trained on how to give myself the pegylated interferon shot and every-day I had to take 5 ribavirin pills. The truth of the matter is, I was so scared, and I was crying, nervous and very upset. My husband was there by my side, however, but with his working schedule, I knew I needed to do this on my own. I had a very stern nurse who insisted that I do this myself, and despite her training me, I broke 6 needles before I finally did it. I was told to give myself the injection on Fridays so that I have the extra 2 days to relax. Yes, I did

have flu-like symptoms and by 9:00 that Friday I was sleeping.

For the first few months my blood work was showing negative, then I was positive 1 month then negative another. This was going on for a while, so I decided to see a liver specialist. My liver doctor was great. She had suggested staying on treatment another 24 weeks besides the 48 weeks. Treatment does not always work for everyone, however. She felt that if 24 more weeks did not help, then I would need to stop.

Yes, I had lost weight, I was very sick at times. I was loosing my hair, I broke out with a rash, I had all the bad side effects, however, and I wanted to beat this disease. I then developed anemia, I had to go for growth factor injections (another injection) due to my red cells becoming very low. I felt my flu symptoms get worse with the growth factor injections. I had to go for blood work every week so that my doctor could watch my blood work, as I did not want to go for a blood transfusion. However, being on the treatment for such a long time, I was not able to continue the extra full 24 weeks due to my triglycerides shooting up so high; my liver doctor called me suggesting I needed to stop my treatment after only continuing my treatment an extra 4 weeks in lieu of the 24 weeks. However, I must say, the virus had become undetectable. I was to go back in January 2008, and if the virus was still undetectable, then I would know that I have survived Hep C.

I forgot to mention yes, I was emotionally distressed I was on antidepressants, cried a lot and did not know why. I have two children to take care of as well. I hated everyone who was happy, laughing while I dreaded every Friday knowing what I needed to do. I must say, I have met a lot of people going through Hep C treatment who have helped me throughout my journey. There were many times I wanted to stop treatment, but I continued with the support of others. Having your family and people around you to give you support is the best medicine.

I was told from my liver doctor that since I had no risk factor for Hep C, she believes that I must have had Hep C since Italy. While living in Italy for only 6 years my mom told me I was always sick. At those times, my mom had a pharmacist coming to my home to give me penicillin injections because she could not afford taking me to doctors. So who knows, I believe, they reused needles at that time. However, moving from one county to another, getting vaccinated is also something to think about. However, I now believe it does not matter how you got this disease, what matters is beating it. There is so much more I can write about. However, what I have now learned about Hep C is that more and more people have it and they just do not know they have it. I now try to help others going through the treatment, giving them all the support I can. That is my goal in life; I would like to become an advocate for Hep C.



Be Sure to Check Out These Other Stories


- Alan's Story
- Brian's Story
- Carol's Story
- David's Story
- Gerald Moreno's Story
- Kathleen's Story
- Leslie's Story
- Martha's Story
- Mike's Story: Part 1
- Twila's Story

www.hcvadvocate.org/community/stories.asp

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Executive Director Editor-in-Chief, HCSP Publications Alan Franciscus	The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.
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Contact information: Hepatitis C Support Project PO Box 427037 San Francisco, CA 94142-7037 alanfranciscus@hcvadvocate.org	

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