

The Winds of Pain
By Anne Mayer

I'm paraphrasing the title of one of my favorite books because it seemed appropriate.

In the same way that the wind can change from a gentle breeze to a gale force in a matter of minutes, pain can develop from the bearable into total agony in less time than an eye blink.

The unpredictability is one of many things that I had to get a handle on in the struggle to survive chronic pain.

The winds of pain will blow through your life at some time. Count on it. It may be a severe illness, a chronic disease or the aging process. We cannot avoid the pain but we all have choices in how we deal with it.

I became so furious and angry at the pain, I was unbearable to be around. God knows, if there had been a market for self-pity I would be a rich woman today.

I began to feel as if I were a walking, ticking time bomb. I could and often did explode in an instant over the most minute things.

The hurt I caused those closest to me is irreparable. It's exceeded only by the harm I did to myself when I turned all the fury inward.

I used the pain to indulge myself in all the addictions and lousy behavior that had become a pattern of the past. If anyone dared to criticize me – hey, I had the perfect response: “Don't you know I'm in agony?” What a great excuse! I popped any and all pain medicines the doctors would give me. The end result being, of course, that nothing worked very long as my body built up a tolerance.

I was becoming a person I didn't know and most importantly did not like. I would have not chosen myself as a friend. Rather than taking a good look at what I was turning into, I ran, as hard and as fast as I could, particularly after anything that would blank out the tremendous hurt my body was going through and allow me to close my eyes to the harmful ways I was using to obtain relief or oblivion.

What stopped my downward spiral? The strangest thing... I began to remember lines from a poem I had to memorize in high school. In essence all it was saying is that I and I alone was responsible for my behavior. No excuses allowed.

For some weird reason the words got through and spoke to me. I was able to listen and not tune them out the way I had been doing with people. (If you're interested, at the end of the article I'll give you the two stanzas.)

I have cleaned up my act, I'm off the heavy duty pain meds except for 1½ I take in the evening when the pain kicks up several notches.

I take across the counter pain pills during the day, usually every four hours. When they don't work or I can't have anymore, I ice, I ice, and then I ice some more. A neighbor has been telling me for years that the trick is not to let the pain get started. I can't do that but I can keep it for the most part within manageable limits.

The best thing is I can do almost all the chores I was accustomed to doing in the past. I'm also back doing the one thing I most enjoy—writing. I once again like and value myself and I treasure that. The self-pity has made a complete exit (well almost).

Do I still have bad days? Of course, but I've learned something. I can and do gut it out. Is it difficult? You bet. But the simple knowledge that I'm able to do it and have done it makes me proud of myself.

The poem that helped me so much is called "Echoes."

"Out of the night that covers me, black as the pit from pole to pole, I thank whatever Gods may be for my unconquerable soul."

"It matters not how strait the gate. How charged with punishments the scroll. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul."

Best to all.

If you have any comments, contact me at anne.mayernm@gmail.com