Coming Up For Air

John Lennon once said:
“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making plans.”
And LIFE happened to yours truly…

May 3, 2017 By Lora René Tucker

As I shared my last blog entry with a friend, I noticed the date and gasped:

“What the What? Three years have passed since my last entry?!” (I have a new-found respect for deadlines…)

She looked up at me, responding:

“Lora… Please, you’ve been busy surviving.”

The past few years have been rather challenging times for me; I have had my share of medical and personal set-backs, one being my elderly mother’s slow slide into dementia. In July 2014, I came up for air to share about my struggles with medication compliance… and life. Now I look back on that time and thank God I didn’t make any poor or irreversible decisions. I had some ups, but also some unusually low downs through 2016 (notwithstanding my vote in November being brutalized… another slow slide!) Yet, I am thankful I came out of this turmoil to find out what was making me feel so morose. It was something biological, the friggin’ size of a grain of rice!

But let me share with you some of the symptoms… In non-clinical English:

In 2012, I believe I began this journey. One of the signpost I remember was: As Hurricane Sandy was devastating the New York coastline, I was out on medical leave, getting a bone marrow biopsy to check on a rogue protein found in some blood tests. No one knew what was going on… Was I in need of a middle age overhaul? Was the hiv rearing its ugly head? I was not happy with my job, uneasy about my health, and I definitely didn’t like the idea of a bone marrow biopsy. By 2015, the biopsy was negative (Thank God!) but I was going once a month to my doctor, giving blood (like a Masai cow). Dr. Laris was watching the calcium levels in my blood rise higher than normal. At the same time, my energy level was in the toilet-bowl (sorry, but it’s the most accurate description). I increasingly felt as if I was walking through Jello. Sometimes everything felt heavy… My energy, the job, the world, Life…

What did John Lennon say?

“Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.”

Something like that…

I am saying:

“Life is what happens to you when you’re busy surviving!”

By 2015, I swung into survival mode; I was pulling tools out of my “professional tool bag”; coping skills and emotional centering activities, anything to maintain some semblance of sanity. As time marched on, (through, and over me like a steam roller!) I felt as if I was moving in a Dali-esk landscape at times, with my inner being swinging from one end to the other like a pendulum on a mega-clock. And I struggled to do the things that brought me joy… working on my jewelry… writing poems… writing this blog! I couldn’t even sit and let my eyes do the walking across a book page without an effort. Something was off… not quite right…

I felt as if I was walking around wearing a 200-pound trench coat and a 100-pound hat.

Let me tell you, “Sonny was Blue.”

I kept working, struggling with my health and worrying about maintaining my healthcare. I had NEVER stopped working and I was fighting to keep on by any means necessary. I was on the brink of not affording my heath/medical care even though I had insurance (those co-pays!) and as I towed every barge, and lifted every bale, my moral was slipping.

Fast track to Spring of 2016:

After coming out of a horrible trip to “Pneumonialand” that kicked my…

Excuse me… After recovering from a terrible bought of pneumonia, Dr. Laris referred me to an Endocrinologist, Dr. Menassis, and the path to recovery began. Being that I had a family history that had thyroid issues up and down my “tree,” and my calcium was so high I was instructed to stop eating calcium-rich foods (I had to stop eating ice cream! Ahhh!) The next and logical exploration was my thyroid gland. So I was CAT scanned and MRI’ed; iodined and x-rayed … and more blood tests. I was moody and anxious, paranoid and depressed, yet determined … This crap had to go! After all the poking and prodding, Dr. Menassis informed me, in the fall of 2016, that it was my parathyroid. MY WHAT?

“Life is what happens while you're busy trying to make sense!” (…of everything around you!)

The doctors working with me helped me do just that, make sense of my crazy hormones and rebellious body. I was referred to Dr. Kuriloff, who’s the chief parathyroid snatcher (the chief of surgery.) Dr. Kuriloff was patient, gave me a plethora of information, and assured me that I will feel the difference very soon out of surgery. The way I felt then, I thought he and Dr. Menassis were “just being nice.” Calming down this crazy Black woman…

(Don’t you feel sometimes that hiv is enough to deal with, WHY do we have to have all these other things happen? I cough at comorbidity!)

Giant step to January, 2017. My surgery was neat and complete. All the medical staff were pros; just great. My suture is so nicely done that when it healed, you could hardly tell, (I'm still looking in the mirror). They also were right; I felt sooo much better, even right out of surgery! Once I came out of the anesthesia, it felt as if a vale was lifted off me and with each day, I felt better than the day before. I was so happy, I heard munchkins and birds singing… I broke into song like I was in "La La Land" or some 1940's MGM musical (in my house!) No, I wasn't hallucinating, just happy. I had a playlist in my head and the theme was joy! 300-pound coat and hat… off, crabbiness… gone… Light Bulb!

On my follow-up visits with the doctors, I was ready to share the joy! In Dr. Menassis' office, a couple of months earlier, I had an event (melt-down) when I lost my patience (supernova-ed) and became highly emotive (pissed-off.) But not this visit. The shrew was tamed. Dr. Menassis came into the examination room like I was the "after" contestant in an ambush make-over. He came in that room knowing I was going to be happy and I was… and humble. He shared that my hypothalamus (part of the limbic system) was assaulted; the low energy, memory loss, mood and anxiety I can blame on one of my parathyroids! (Although I know someone is reading this, saying: "Hum, can't blame all her drama on that gland.") I grabbed his hand and smiled like I use to when my dad would say: "… And here is your piece of Grandma's pound cake." I shared with Dr. Kuriloff how I gained so much insight into how my clients must feel. I truly understand when they are struggling with their mental health and/or medical issues and still have to keep it moving; negotiating daily living and any additional demands. I gained a higher level of empathy because of my illness.

Hell, I didn't know HOW sick I was until I got better!

"Life is what happens while you're busy making other plans."

To tell you the truth, you can make the simplest plans and life can tap you on the shoulder … Or bite you in the ass. You really must be okay with change when you're hiv positive; able to live in the moment, just let life happen and plan; have a goal, see a future. Everybody has set-backs; ours just tend to set-us-further-back than others. I fought the funk; I would not give in to my melancholy; I had faith that I would be able to "lick my wounds" and recover. I knew that Lora was in retrograde and that, too, would pass. And it did. I am back to writing, going out more, being more present with my mother. Although I want to be better NOW … I know it's a process. So, I embrace all that is me and work on the improvements! I am an African American woman, straight (but not narrow), single with no children, living with hiv and depression but also with joy, determination and faith. Yes, I can, keep hope alive, and (YES) my life matters. I am (still) one of the 99%, working in a profession that is barely acknowledged and not respected; the hardest job I ever loved. And when I can, I'll come up for air; always trying, in my way, with my life, to make a difference while I am busy making other plans.

P.S. Happy Birthday fellow Taureans! And

Happy Mother's Day and Birthday Mom!

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