



Maria Wells

On April 11th, 2019 I was excited about finally getting back to feeling good and looking forward to a pain free life. On April the 12th I woke up to what would be a lifelong battle of complications from a surgery that was supposed to heal me.

This is my journey. It began in 2018, with a few slightly different kinds of headaches and earaches. Numerous times I went to the doctor thinking it was an ear infection and was treated for one. It wasn't until it kept reoccurring and the pain kept getting worse and worse that I began to worry. Finally, I ended up in an after hour clinic describing my symptoms and the PA said I think you have something called Trigeminal Neuralgia (TN). He immediately sent me to radiology for a CT scan and then to a neurologist/neurosurgeon for further evaluation. Shand's Hospital in Gainesville Florida is where I ended up having 5 more invasive brain procedures. It was then and there I discovered what Trigeminal Neuralgia was and what Neuroscience and Neurosurgery was about. For those like myself, who had no idea what TN was about, let me give you the short version. It is a chronic pain condition that affects the jaw and the face and it carries sensation from the face to the brain. It is most commonly found in women over 50. It is also considered rare, with less than 200,000 cases per year are diagnosed worldwide. It is also called the suicide disease. It can last for years or be a lifelong battle, there is no cure, but is treatable to some degree.

Like everything else in my life I always see a glass half full rather than half empty and I always lean on God's Word found in Philippians 4:13 "For I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me".


The doctor's first phase of treatment (18 months) was with medication. For someone who rarely takes an aspirin, this in and of itself, it was quite devastating. Now, I was on serious medications for seizures and nerve pain as well as medications typically given to patients with mental problems. These medications had serious side effects. I am highly sensitive to medicines and do not do well when taking them. I gained 30 pounds and as a fitness instructor at 5'4" that really took a toll on my mental well being. I retained water and could not stay awake. I even found myself having to stop and rest on the drive to work! After battling this for over a year, a team of neurosurgeons at Shand's, said I was a candidate for MVD (microvascular decompression surgery). MVD is an invasive brain surgery, where a hole is cut into your skull, the size of a quarter, and a sponge is placed under the nerve to relieve the pain through decompression. I was told it would be a 2-3 week recovery and I would be able to return to work. That was the first of 5 surgeries.

After the first surgery, I got meningitis, a staph infection which produced hydrocephalus, which is water on the brain. I also had 11 spinal taps in 6 weeks. This had me traveling from Tifton to Shand's weekly and in and out of the hospital. In July, the 2nd surgery was done because the original incision would not heal and kept leaking CSF fluid. A titanium plate was placed in my head. However, pressure was building up in my head. The third surgery was done to place a VP shunt in my head to relieve the pressure. In my mind, I had become a patient of revolving door surgery and I was beginning to lose all hope. I knew that God was greater than any situation, but this was something I had never faced. Most days, all I could do was claim God was my "Jehovah Rapha" my healer.

Infection control forced a 4th surgery to manage the infection in my brain and body. The VP shunt that was placed just a few days prior, was removed and I remained in ICU for eleven days with tubes coming out of my head combined with massive doses of extremely strong IV antibiotics until the infection could be cleared. It was life or death and this was without doubt, my lowest point; because I realized that "peace that passes all understanding". God was very present in my room and I realized that a long and healthy life was not promised to anyone and that my life might be coming to an end.

September 2, 2019 was my 5th and final surgery. They removed the titanium plate and placed an LP lumbar shunt in my lower back, which will remain there forever to maintain CSF flows in my brain. I have vestibular nerve damage which created trouble with my balance and dizziness which they say can subside but after a year it has not completely gone away. I can say with certainty, I am much better and healthier than I was a year ago. I have gone back to the gym and am losing weight and gaining some of my independence back as I am finally able to drive again.

During these past two years, I have gained new insight into my priorities. Relationships with family are high on that list. Never taking a moment of life for granted is something I hold dear. If you love someone, tell them, hug them, thank people for what they do and remember that all of the things we encounter on a day to day basis can be taken away in a moment's notice. I thank God for allowing me another day to be of service to Him. I thank my husband for being my constant during the most difficult and trying times I have ever had to face. Together we have endured. I know I may still face challenges but with God's unending love and grace and the support of my family and friends, I will make it through day by day. Stay in Faith, love your Family and always stay Fit.

 mariawells54@gmail.com