

Fahmidan Journal
Issue 15: Thyroid and Autoimmune Warriors
May 2023

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A.R. Arthur

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It has been two years since our last issue partnering with The Thyroid Trust and I must say that I am extremely grateful to be working with the Trust to uplift our voices and highlight the millions that live with a variety of thyroid illnesses that are extremely debilitating and can be fatal. This issue also focuses on those with autoimmune and chronic illnesses that often go unnoticed by others.

As a member of Gen-Z, I have grown accustomed to many of my friends, colleagues and acquaintances having such conditions. Often, it is assumed that youth means healthiness and energy. But this is slowly becoming a myth amongst my generation and others in an era where environmental factors, genetic predisposition and indeed, the quality of food have distorted our bodies and warped our organs. This is not to say that we are victims, no! We are stronger for our suffering despite the lack of empathy and respect of others who often dismiss and diminish our life-long battles.

As someone with three autoimmune/chronic conditions, I have often found myself at odds with the world and how it treats people. I am often reminded of the early days during my Sociology BSc where we questioned how society values strong productive members of society that produce capital that uplifts the economy. Whilst contrastingly discarding those that fail to fit this narrow perspective of human existence. I often question what it means to be healthy and without pain, but the words present in this Issue assure me that I, like many others are not alone.

Hashimoto's has often robbed me of sleep, activities and indeed the capacity to interact. But through my illness, I have also learnt that I am my biggest supporter as often family and friends will say 'but you don't look sick' or simply dismiss one's suffering in comparison to their own. Never let that diminish your pain and never allow others to minimise your illness. But we are no victims!

Never let family and friends that fail you and lack empathy dampen your resolve to live your life and achieve incredible things despite your health!

If you don't have an autoimmune or chronic condition, I would sincerely urge you to read up and support charities like The Thyroid Trust as well as those in your local community that suffer. Together, we can find new solid ground to thrive on despite the challenges and burdens we face.

Thank you for reading this Issue.
A.R,Arthur
Editor in Chief
Fahmidan Journal/Publishing & Co.
Est 2020

Dear Reader,

My name is Louise Sellar, and I am the Director of The Thyroid Trust. The Thyroid Trust is a UK registered thyroid charity led by patients, but who work closely with medics and researchers. The Thyroid Trust provides reliable information and peer support for thyroid patients and their families. The charity is working hard to educate, raise awareness and influence change to make things better for all thyroid patients.

For any reader who is unaware, the thyroid is an endocrine gland located in the front of your neck. It is a vital hormone gland that plays a major role in the metabolism, growth and development of the human body and it helps to regulate many body functions.

The Thyroid trust is thrilled to have been selected by the Fahmidan Journal for this Thyroid and Autoimmune Warrior Charity issue and would like to say a massive thank you to Anthony and the team for giving Thyroid and patients of Autoimmune conditions a voice.

As this issue is published on World Thyroid Day, 25th May 2023, which falls in International Thyroid Awareness Week, I thought I would share that our chosen theme this year is #thyroidfamily. A hashtag that not only raises awareness of the genetic links of thyroid disorders but also celebrates our community and those that offer support to others when they need it most.

As a thyroid patient myself, I have autoimmune Hyperthyroidism in the form of Graves' disease. I appreciate first-hand how relentless and challenging living with a chronic illness can be. I have great empathy and admiration for the many thyroid and patients living with autoimmune conditions, I have had the privilege of speaking too. I hope that this issue can make them feel that they are not alone, and they too are part of a wider #thyroidfamily.

Best wishes

Louise

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Hashtag Loneliness

Jenny Allen

#Campaign.
Frame, art in galleries on the wall
showing men and women #feeling
#meditating #mindfully
practicing
#affirmation and #gratitude.
Prevent mental solitude,
with monthly #wellbeing calendars in the loo
#raising #awareness whilst having a poo.
#poems
#blogs
hashtag
hashtag
#BREATHE.
#TV documentaries #celebrities
#talk and share, DM messages of #care
Loneliness impacts #mental #health
#crisis. Our children are #stressed,
sitting test after test
The #campaigns a success
#mental #health #matters.
We know, we all say
But no one answered my call yesterday
or returned the confessional I bravely say.
On the phone.
after the beep.
I speak.
*'I'm calling in regards to some professional help
to manage my suffering Mental Health.'*

Jenny is a qualified teacher with an MA in education and delivers a portfolio of creative education offers for children, young people, and families at Gallery Oldham and Oldham Libraries. After giving birth in 2017, Jenny became extremely unwell with postpartum thyroiditis but was ignored and dismissed with a plethora of mental health related misdiagnosis, including postnatal psychosis. For the following four years, Jenny remained unwell and without medical support, which undoubtedly affected her mental health. The poem Hashtag Loneliness aims to articulate a small part of Jenny's complex journey with a hope that it may prevent just one other person feeling less alone. Jenny has recently had total thyroidectomy and continues to advocate for her own and others' thyroid health.

HEART AND SOUL

Julia Patten

The pockets of my soul are filled with sorrow.
Sadness makes my life feel so bereft.
No more laughter, no more joy, simply silence;
Not a modicum of happiness is left.

My heart is huddled in a corner.
It shuns the brightness of the sun.
It shields itself from pain and from longing,
With no desire to seek out simple fun.

One day my spirits will be high.
One day my heart will sing a song.
When you return to me and I lie next to thee,
At last I'll know that we belong.

Psychology graduate, Julia Patten, lives at the edge of the Lake District. She started writing poetry and fiction in 2011, after a career in public relations and publicity. She enjoys writing rhyming poetry, primarily, but is not afraid to try her hand at occasional free verse as well. She is inspired by everything from romance to nature to politics. Her latest collection, 'Burnout' is her ninth collection, containing fifty-two poems of the nearly five hundred she has written. Twenty-seven other books she has self-published include novels, novellas, short stories, a lockdown diary and one children's storybook. All books can be found on www.feedaread.com. Search Julia Patten.

Travels in Chronic Town

Mary Salome

Welcome to the virtual tour!

So, you've got a chronic illness! Whether you woke up just as the diagnosis bus dumped you here or you've known you were on your way for years, it can be tricky to find your way around. This guide is designed to help you navigate the strange and sometimes bewildering world of Chronic Town.

You will get lost, that's a guarantee, but you'll be in good company. Your doctors will likely be as lost as you are! Not to worry. Follow us from the Old City to the Theatre of Fatigue and points in between!

The Old City

Every tour of Chronic Town should start with a visit to the Old City. You can wander aimlessly for years without a map, stumbling over strange symptoms, or you can organize a medical records excavation and develop your own guide based on that. Either way, you're in for a real adventure!

Many travelers who visit the Old City know where their ancestral house is located. They can walk right up to the front door, knock, and get an answer to whether grandma had Multiple Sclerosis, or grandpa died of a stroke. The path isn't as direct for people whose family histories are murkier, but the challenge is part of the thrill!

If you're cramped with pain or suddenly have a hole in your visual field, don't let that get in the way of the bigger picture! The Old City may seem like a thing of the past, but it's more alive than you might realize, and Chronic Town won't let you forget it!

Lake Heredity

Located on the edge of The Old City, Lake Heredity is a surprise for every visitor. You have no choice but to swim here. Ask your relatives, if you can find them, what they thought of it, but the water is different for everyone. If you don't like it, too bad!

The Symptom Pit

This is a great place to visit while you're in Chronic Town if you've been recently diagnosed or just feel crappy for no known reason. The gooey tar that you might stir up as you dive into researching your symptoms can leave a sticky residue on your psyche, but nothing beats a fear-induced research spree. If you visit the Pit between midnight and 4 AM, you can add sleep deprivation to the mix for a really wild ride. Not to be missed!

No Way Café

How about a big piece of cake and a cup of coffee? Or maybe a slice of our famous pie with a glass of milk? Not in the mood for sweets? There's pizza, and our specialty fries come with a house-made aioli that is creamy heaven!

But guess what -- You can't eat any of that anymore because you're suddenly allergic to it all! Oh, go ahead, try, and see if your joints don't swell again. If you can't walk tomorrow, you can soak in Lake Heredity until you can bear your own weight again. Then come back and console yourself with a cup of herbal tea and a stale rice cake. We'll set that aside for you. Try not to roll your eyes when you order it.

Theatre of Fatigue

Ready for a little nightlife? Too bad! You're going to be too tired for that. Whether you're recovering from surgery, your immune system is attacking your tissues, or your

medication is making you nod off during climax, you're just going to have to take a nap now and again. And again.

Life is a cabaret, and immune malfunction and bloating are part of the show.

Thanks for taking the tour!

Check us out next week for our tour of bus station bathrooms: From the dread of having to use them to discovering that they're locked when you really need them.

Mary Salome (she/her) is a queer Arab- and Irish-American writer and media activist who lives in San Francisco. Her prose and poetry have been published in Food for our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists, Tiny Seed Journal, Solstice: A Winter Anthology Vol 2, and Archive of the Odd. Her short story "Okami in the Bayview" has been nominated for a WSFA Small Press Award.

On Rough Patches (& Contemplation in all Corners)
Jen Schneider

Alarms would ring often. Sleep and snooze not always within reach. Funny how I never heard the sounds of my own body until all muscles creaked. A slow groan turned grind. Duty called. Scents seduced. The cooker simmered pot-roast (brisket brined / carrots undercooked) and potatoes. The grater processed tough rind.

Not unlike a daily commute. Congestion in all corners. A rotating mix of pre-set tunes. NPR on one dial. Elton John on another. I'd will myself into lands of thought. No idea store bought. In time I stopped hearing the tunes. Even as they streamed. All lyrics dimly lit and layered. Mostly pipe dreams.

I'd focus on the ticking minutes. Waze seriously overrated. I considered the train but always grew distracted. Scheduling grids grating. Font always fading. The backyard bird feeder a reminder of the cautions and conflict associated with crowd control. Feathered friends are no fools. Food fights one of many tools. Trials and tribulations in all corners. Seed would fall then settle. Again, I'd forget. There was tea on the kettle. Distractions a daily pollutant.

Doctors would ask if I considered alternate routes (the downtown depot is divine) then simultaneously suggest I do my best to avoid more stress. Comedy hour on replay. All engines spinning. Four-wheel drive on over-drive. I've learned that most things get harder with age. Propositions and predispositions more extreme. All mammals eat – not an easy feat. Whining as robust as the wind. To the right. Now the left. Gusts both guard and game.

I've never been a wine drinker. Can't tell the difference between rose and blush. Much more skilled in spectrums and degrees of skin-tone flush. The patches would rotate with the seasons. Prone to anger whenever intake (f)altered. Flashing lights. Feign delight.

New recruits (patches of unidentified origin mark their terrain) cry out in series of selfies. I'd try to make sense of their code. Couldn't do it any better than Frog and Toad. Their fanbase has a Twitter account that chirps daily. Every three hours. A bit that won't stop (also doesn't bite). Twitter policies on parade. Just the other day, "Frog went leaping over rocks and toad came puffing up behind him".

Puffing. A relatable predicament. Puff the Magic Dragon both fiery and fierce. A childhood favorite. An upbringing neither fair nor fairytale. I've never lived by the sea. Though I do enjoy a frolic in the autumn mist. So long as the patches and the puffing can peacefully co-exist.

On good days they linger. In layers. Patches across yards. Skin now a rough terrain. The kind that probes and prods. Like a poem both formal and avant-garde. And a toddler who wants answers. Scholars write that a typical three-year-old asks Why at least five times a day. Often more. Yet, I'd rarely paused to either listen and/or question my body's unusual and blatant cries. Signs and signals blinking. All tracks delayed. Symbols raged as strands of syllables tangled. A full-blown pain-scale range. Emojis not yet emitted in real-time. Attention in limited supply.

Researchers also note that the frequency of questions fluctuates as we age. Women consistently (and persistently) less likely to ask in public spaces. I read Chrissy Teigen didn't even realize she had had an abortion.

Some say it's never too late, but I'm late (doctors' orders out of date) to the imaginary pot of medicinal gold at the end of the rainbow even while I remain ready for feeding. Mind over matter. Check all ingredient batter. Pickles on the side. An open-faced turkey platter. I crave answers.

The backyard feeder is always busy. A bustling hub of inflammatory activity. An item (persistent issue) never destined for the garage. Aviary crews at the ready. Cravings in all corners. They scratch and claw not unlike my own fingers. Always in the middle of the night. When we should all be in bed. The patches wait. Ready to be fed. I listen. Consume chirps. Count bill snaps and wing beats. Like bits of text. We tweet. Calls like morning alarms. Make note of recommendations for Vitamin D. Serve suet of the organic variety.

Even when I'd question -- at scheduled doctor visits with which I always complied, I was (mostly) left alone / (simply) more tired. Me not the only one who did not listen. Doctors scribbled notes in dribbles while patients next door -- some to the right / others to the left frothed. I craved a Friendly's Fribble, even the cervix now friable. It happens, they'd say. Why, I'd reply. Suddenly the songbirds go awry. I'd consume the sounds of silence. The only lyric in surround sound that of fury -- not temperament but terrain. Rough patches in all corners. Toad knows the grounds play a long game. Frog, too. They, like I, listen to the sounds -- of the birds and the bees. And time. Skin (and sleep) both a blessing and a duty. Songs of innocence

threads of silk and caramel sauce. Depots and repos. Bird calls and calls of the wild. A time for fairytale dreams. I listen / to the frogs and the toads. The birds and the bees. The busy roads. The roar of the trains. The backyard feeders. The tangled traffic. The questions. The signals. The sounds / of silence -- that continue to confine as the alarm clock rings.

Jen Schneider is an educator who lives, works, and writes in small spaces throughout Pennsylvania.

Sugar In The Blood

Phillip Scott Mandel

I. Status Report, Tandem T:slim X2 Insulin Pump

Six units of insulin remaining in cartridge
encased in t:holster rotating belt clip, black
23" plastic tube running from pump to injection site
filled with 11.5 units of insulin
6mm subcutaneous canula also filled with insulin, 0.3 units
1.13 units of basal insulin delivered hourly
Control IQ hybrid closed-loop technology active
0.61 units of insulin "on board"

II. Repair, Repair, Do Not Despair

The low E key on the digital piano sticks
I never knew how much I used that key until it stuck
like how one never remembers being well until they are ill
Twenty-one years spent eating anything
Now half my life diabetic

III. Status Report, Dexcom G6 Sensor

Subcutaneous wire stuck fast to back of right arm
Four days of recommended life remaining
Clear, waterproof, hypoallergenic, latex-free Lexcam adhesive patch
surrounding sensor, stuck fast to arm
Transmitter inserted into plastic Dexcom G6 sensor case,
sending via bluetooth blood glucose level data
to Tandem T: Slim X2 insulin pump and Dexcom iPhone app

IV. Do Not Despair

I can fix the piano like I can fix my pancreas,
which is to say, I can't. I have not the skill nor knowledge
But I can take my piano to a music store
and I can take myself to my doctor
but neither one makes a bit of difference

V. Status Report

149 milligrams per deciliter of sugar in the blood

VI. Despair

because these days I never play the piano
and these days I feel the nerves in my feet starting to tingle

21 Years On
Phillip Scott Mandel

On the obverse side of this paper
is the word “index” and I cannot recall
what it’s doing there or why I wrote it.

If that isn’t proof I’m going insane
or getting older and losing my wits
then perhaps I’m just a hypochondriac.

Tomorrow is another batch of labs, fasting,
to test the overabundance of iron in my blood;
Iron, sugar, is there any fucking blood in my blood?

There is blood and there are needles,
there is a brick of insulin in my pocket
with a tube connected to a cannula in my thigh.

Isn’t that just the stupidest way to die?

Phillip Scott Mandel is the founding editor of [Abandon Journal](#) and has an MFA from Texas State University. His award-winning work has appeared in The Gettysburg Review, Passages North, Bull, and many other journals. He lives in Austin.

Cactus
Wren Donovan

Your body can't be touched except
by special birds and spiders.
Your thirst is quenched by fog because
there is no rain for you.
You're stuck in desiccated ground,
all the worst dry places. Cracked earth
pulls away in patterns
triggering trypophobia.
Your army-green conceals a crown
of thorns, face full of needles.
Even your roots are spiny.
Self-pity
for my prickly past.
I hoard what I receive, conceal
the moisture under olive-drab, defend
with thorns and barbs and threats
and self-deceptive dryness. Spears punctuate
the lines, the curves of plumpness.
We keep our distance even from each other.
Succulent specimens, we pretend drought.
At night, the cold surprises.
Orange cools to blue, and white to silver.
Mice and eight-legged creatures sip
what droplets I can spare, what may seep out
to glisten in the starlight, stain the sand.

Wren Donovan's poetry appears or is upcoming in Poetry South, Emerge, Harpy Hybrid Review, Yellow Arrow, Cauldron Anthology, Anti-Heroin Chic, Moist Poetry, and elsewhere in print and digital formats. She studied Classics, folklore, anthropology, psychology, and creative writing at Millsaps College, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and University of Southern Mississippi. When not writing, Wren reads Tarot and history books, practices dance meditation, and talks to cats. She lives in Tennessee among many trees and lurks on twitter @WrenDonovan. Links to published work: WrenDonovan.weebly.com.

Butterflies

Helen Chambers

Hot.

So hot!

I fling open the classroom windows, peel off my cardigan and ask the class if they're too hot. They shake heads, no, and slip coats on, while I bathe my burning face in the welcome breeze.

I must be menopausal, I think, and guzzle half the contents of my water bottle.

Tired.

So tired!

Eye-achingly tired. Yet at nights, I have long periods of wakefulness and watch the dawn-light extend long fingers around the curtains. I worry about how I'll get through the day on virtually no sleep.

Shaking.

My hands shake, like I'm really old.

My welcome day off, and I slide into my seat in the lecture hall (I'm studying - part-time - for a masters degree). The other, younger, students look at me suspiciously. 'I'm not a drinker,' I want to say - but I hide my hands beneath the table and stay quiet. There are butterflies in my stomach, come to think of it. Throughout my entire body, in fact.

Headache.

Not a bad one, just a behind-the-eyes sinus one. Perhaps a low-grade infection. I've had this kind of thing before, loads of times, no need to bother the doctors. I take a painkiller after my evening meal - I'll push through it.

Wide-eyed.

My eyes are large and staring, magnified by my 'long-sight' glasses lenses. I look awake. Actually, I look deranged. Or high. Surely that's not the paracetamol?

Grumpy.

That's what my teenage children call me, most of the time. I snap back that maybe if they helped more, I might not be. The truth is, everyone and everything really irritates me. I take myself off for long walks and wonder what living alone in a lighthouse would feel like.

Hungry.

Always hungry and - this is great - I'm not gaining weight! Maybe that isn't quite so healthy or normal. It'll settle down.

Chest pain.

I'm a bit young for heart problems - but chest pain finally propels me to my GP. Within an hour, I'm in hospital, wired up to an ECG machine. I crack embarrassing jokes about being heartless. The nurse smiles politely, and asks: 'is your resting pulse usually this high?'

Thyroid function.

A battery of blood tests follow including one for thyroid function, whatever that means. I scroll through my phone to find out what a thyroid is, what a thyroid does, and where in my body a thyroid is. By the time the staff confirm I have thyrotoxicosis, I've memorised the

symptom list and know I have them all. The butterfly-shaped gland in my neck which produces hormones to regulate my body's metabolism isn't working properly.

Relapse.

A high proportion of people relapse after treatment, they say.

I won't relapse, I'm sure. I'm a healthy person who takes care of myself.

But when I do, three years later - dramatically, and quickly, making me feel so much worse than first time round - at least I understand what's wrong.

Helen writes flash and short stories and has words in Janus, Ellipsis, and Flashback Fiction. She won the Fish Short Story Prize in 2018. This summer, she's directing The Winter's Tale for Wivenhoe Outdoor Shakespeare and worries about staging 'exit pursued by bear.' Read about this, and her other publications at: helenchamberswriter.wordpress.com She also blogged about her RAI treatment for Graves Disease at <https://mybigfatthyroidgravesdisease.home.blog/2018/11/08/going-nuclear/>

**For a very dear lady
Lorraine Williams**

In memory of Theresa Baker
Who we all loved
I pen these words
And I don't know what to say
She was such a shining light
Such a peaceful, calm soul
So loving and caring
So wise
She slipped away
And now she's gone

She walked with us by the sea
She brought us tea and biscuits
She sat at the welcome desk
Welcoming everyone
She was curious and intelligent
Sensitive and sweet
Part of our thyroid family

May she rest in peace

Theresa Baker was one of the founding Trustees of The Thyroid Trust and previously a committed volunteer with the British Thyroid Foundation London Group. Sadly Theresa, who was very well loved by many friends, passed away this year.

Lorraine Williams co-founded The Thyroid Trust and previously ran the old BTF London Group, with Theresa and some other key people. In 2022 Lorraine stepped away from her work with the charity and is now happily editing the Broadstairs Beacon, a seasonal magazine about the small seaside town where she lives. She also has a broad artistic practice as the artist @BeeMcCHenderson and runs @MindfulThanet.

Little Devil
Vroni Holzmann

Let me describe what it's like
to live with anxieties.

I can't.
You'd have to be there

and experience it for yourself.
Not that I wish this upon you.

When you are living
with thyroid anxieties

you have several battles
going on at the same time

whilst you will never win
the actual war.

So first of all
you have a feeling of pending doom,

a weird physical discomfort
that takes normality away from you

and replaces it with
something unpleasant.

It is hard to explain,
which is your second problem,

because no-one likes
vague symptoms and weird physical states.

Your GP goes, maybe you're depressed?
No, I'm not fucking depressed.

But I am really unhappy.
It's a strange state of mind.

You don't quite function
like other people.

You'll have concentration problems
and self-esteem issues.

You might not want to be sociable
and just hide away

or quite the opposite,
and crave for

friends to meet you
in order to distract from

those horrible feelings
of fear and pending danger.

But you might not get much support
as it is hard for people around you

to understand
what you are going through.

And who is the culprit
behind all this terror?

Is it really just a little
organ in your throat?

Will anyone believe you
when you tell them this?

Will you even believe yourself?
You better believe it!

This cute little thyroid
is the devil out to get you.

Dear Thyroid Ally
Vroni Holzmann

I would like to talk to you
about something important.

We were both victims
of the same assault.

We have a tyrant
living inside our body.

It is attacking us
and not letting us live our lives.

We used to sing
and dance and laugh

and now we cry
and worry and crouch in fear.

You think I'm overdramatic?
You don't really recognise yourself in this?

Fair enough.
It's just an allegory.

But we do both suffer
and struggle with the same thing,

and this makes us the strongest
of allies

although we never meet.
We suffer in silence.

We suffer alone.
And we think no one cares.

So now I want you to know
that I care and support you.

You have a debilitating disease
even if it doesn't seem that way.

The drama and fame are reserved for cancer
and such well publicised conditions.

But please feel taken seriously,
if not always by doctors

or friends or journalists
who write ignorant articles.

Feel taken seriously by me
and other fellow sufferers.

We know what you are going through
and we feel your pain.

You are not alone, that's all
I wanted to tell you.

Here's a hug
from a thyroid sufferer

to another,
squeezing you tight.

Vroni Holzmann is a composer, street pianist, photographer, cartoonist, poet, and Bavarian cabaret performer. She lives and works in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her education includes a Master of Music in Composition and a Bachelor of Arts in Photography. Her poetry has most recently been published in Gallus, a Poetry Scotland publication. Vroni's poetry and other arts can be found at www.vronionline.net.

Numb
Hildie S. Block

When one day in late October you wake up numb from the waist down, you are anything but—

Numb.

After months of being told, and believing – you have allergies, Raynaud’s phenom (which sounds cool! Even exciting), asthma, carpal tunnel (in my FEET?), anxiety, and the list goes on –

One night you go to sleep and you awake and – BAM. Nothing.

You take a warm bath, willing your legs to FEEL.

Go buy better shoes.

Pretend. Deny. Drink.

Stumble.

Your father was the exact same age: 31.

And his decline: anger, canes, incontinence, wheelchair, dementia. Nursing home at 57.

You look at your husband of 1 year and offer to release him from your mother’s prison.

Your mother? You can’t tell her. Okay, you tried, but she refused to hear.

Honestly?

You are anything but numb.

Hildie S. Block (she/her) is a night owl, a writer, a teacher, and a little obsessed with the weather. Her day doesn't start until after one cup of coffee with a little NPR. She lives in Virginia with her family and her axolotl named Xipe! Her work has appeared in the Washington Post, Salon, Cortland Review, Gargoyle, (and about 50 other places) and recently won the 2022 Washington Writer's Publishing House Holiday contest and will appear in Mason Jar Press' Jarnal and Big Whoopie Deal soon. When not writing, she's teaching, previously at George Washington and American Universities and currently leading workshops at the Writer's Center www.writer.org and on her own www.hildieblockworkshop.com

Opposite feelings

Eme Bampton-Greene

‘How are you finding the Graves?’ Up and down I reply at the time but afterwards I think about ways to sum up the past few years and there are two things

The first is best captured with action verbs like smash, tear, hurl, rip. It’s a compulsion in my mind to destroy things and be physical. I would like to flip tables and send them crashing. The bigger and heavier the better. Or tip large household items down tall staircases. In my head the actions are explosive and violent. I want to smash plates and hear them crack fast and loud against hard flooring. I want to take my jacket off and slap it on the bedroom floor, then do it over and over again. I think about sex a lot and become overwhelmed by a frantic need to use my body. I fantasise about taking up boxing but don’t have the energy

The second is summed up by a longing to give over and lean back into the deep tiredness that I’m warding off. I want to find a warm, sunny spot on someone's windowsill to curl up and watch the world. Not giving up exactly but not being called on to participate. To observe and be still, absorbing micro sensations like sun on skin. I want a huge woman’s hand to come down from the sky and using the thumb I climb onto the palm and rest there for days in the grooves. I want to be put through a pasta maker. Be pressed out. To give over and not do much of anything. I want to move very very slowly

Eme was diagnosed with Graves Disease in 2018 when she was 27 years-old. She works in the disability sector and volunteers for The Wren Project where she helps support people who have received a diagnosis of autoimmune disease. She is interested in bringing people together to share their stories of chronic illness and explore its impact.

Every Day Resilience

Wendy Kennar

For more than thirty years, my body just *worked*. It worked without me thinking about it too much, and it worked without needing much more than general maintenance, in the form of healthy food choices, an active lifestyle, and adequate rest each night. My body was durable and dependable, and in some ways not unlike the off-white microwave we had in our kitchen. The trusted microwave always worked as expected. It wasn't flashy or fancy, and neither am I. The microwave worked for bowls of after-school popcorn snacks and re-heating leftover pasta. Until the day the microwave suddenly didn't work. It didn't power on, or display any digital numbers, or make any of its usual beeps. Likewise, my body always did what I needed it to do. Until a Sunday in July 2010, when it suddenly didn't.

Up until that point, my body was a literal powerhouse. I got pregnant soon after we started trying. I told myself I wouldn't be affected by morning sickness, and I wasn't. I told my husband, Paul, he didn't need to worry; I wouldn't have any strange cravings during my pregnancy. And I didn't. I felt healthy and strong when I was pregnant; my body behaved exactly as I expected.

My body was a wonder; a thing to behold and appreciate with gratitude. A marvel that successfully sheltered and grew a new life, Ryan — a teenager now, standing taller than my 5'6", with an ever-deepening voice I don't always recognize. I still stand outside his bedroom and watch him sleep, noticing the way his toes now reach the edge of his bed. This boy who didn't even exist not too long ago and who now I can't imagine my life without. And my body did that. My body gave him life.

Because my body was indisputably strong and capable.

But that was then.

Now, this same body betrays me by attacking itself.

Because that's the definition of autoimmune disease — it's the body attacking itself. My body no longer behaves as I would like it to, which often leaves me feeling incapable, weak, and vulnerable. It makes me feel as if I'm navigating the world in a defective body that I can't completely rely on.

I have been diagnosed with Undifferentiated Connective Tissue Disease (UCTD), a rare autoimmune disease. This invisible disability causes me daily pain, fatigue, and weakness in my left leg.

On high-pain days, it's so easy to think about all I have lost, all that I struggle to do, all the ways my autoimmune disease has changed me. So-called little things — changing the linens, standing on a step stool to reach our holiday decorations, getting in and out of the car — which are often some-degree-of-hard for me to do.

But there is a flip side. A glass-is-half-full way to look at the situation. I never dial it in, I never give an easy *no* and cite my autoimmune disease as an excuse not to do something.

I look at the photos hanging on our refrigerator, the framed pictures on our family picture wall in the living room, and there is the visual proof of all my family and I have done. A tour of Hearst Castle on Ryan's seventh birthday because he wanted to see a castle; horseback riding during the summer before Ryan started middle school; a day at the San Diego Zoo; riding a rollercoaster with Ryan at Legoland; yearly visits to the Aquarium of the Pacific; and our biggest family adventure yet — a trip to Maui complete with parasailing and zip lining adventures.

Living with an autoimmune disease means I have had to adjust my expectations of my body. Yet I too often compare myself to others — other women I see wearing above-the-knee skirts revealing no scars on the backs of their legs, Paul's daily step count, high because he opts to take the stairs rather than wait for an elevator at work. I know it's not a fair

comparison at all, but I still do it. It makes me think of my teaching days. Different students had different goals, which meant different ways of measuring progress. I wouldn't compare a native English speaker's reading fluency score with an English learner's fluency score. And I shouldn't compare my daily step count with anyone else's.

I used to think my body was kick ass for what it could do — commuting on six public buses a day while attending college classes full-time and working part-time, climbing the stairs to the top of the Arc de Triomphe, working a twelve-hour shift in a flower shop on Valentine's Day, giving birth to Ryan without any pain medication.

But now I know that was just scratching the surface of what it means to be kick ass. Because now is when I'm truly showing how tough I am, how strong I am, how resilient I am. Living with an autoimmune disease has caused me to re-define words I thought I knew. Words I thought I understood. Words like *strength*, *weakness*, and *pain* don't mean what they once did. Their definitions have grown and expanded, because living with a chronic illness causing chronic pain is hard. And I'm doing it every day.

Wendy Kennar is a mother, wife, writer, and former teacher. Her writing has appeared in a number of publications and anthologies, both in print and online. You can read more from Wendy at www.wendykennar.com where she writes about books, boys, and bodies (living with an invisible disability). You can find Wendy on Instagram @wendykennar. Wendy is currently at work on a memoir-in-essays.

looking back, but only to see how far you have come
Louise Sellar

Twitching and trembling, leaving me shaky
Hair is thinning and weak, making me conscious
Yawning through the exhaustion, leaving me craving my bed
Racing heart and palpitations, making me breathless
Optic dryness and discomfort, leaving me wanting relief
Irritability and itching, making me feel like I'm going insane.
Depression and anxiety, leaving me isolated

Things may be tough, but you are tougher, my new mantra
Hope has returned, feelings of happiness
Yoga and mindfulness, my new routine
Rest has been restored, feelings of relief
Optimistic outlook, my new point of view
Improving results, feelings of joy
Determination to make things better, my new aim

Louise Sellar has worked in the UK construction industry for over 17 years. Currently, she is the Sales and Marketing Director of a manufacturing company in Oxfordshire. Louise is the very proud mother of two children and volunteers at her children's local athletics club. She is a lover of the great outdoors, enjoying the activities of hiking, paddle boarding and wild water swimming. In the last five years, she has completed several ultra-challenge events and raised money for multiple, charitable causes. Louise found out about the Thyroid Trust in 2020 following a diagnosis of Graves' Disease. The following year, she received radioactive iodine treatment. As a result of this experience, she is passionate about raising awareness, assisting in the education of, and supporting other thyroid patients and their families. Louise started with the Trust in December 2022.

THE GRAVES' DISEASE CHEF

Mina Grace

I'm Mina Grace your resident, healthy and happy Graves' Disease Chef. Wife, Momma to four, Grammy to one, recipe developer, Author, Executive Chef and Coach.

I have Graves' Disease and Hyperthyroidism. I was diagnosed with it in 2015 and still live with it every day.

The Graves' Disease Chef was born a year after I was diagnosed with Graves' Disease, Hyperthyroidism. An autoimmune disorder that happens when your immune system (which is supposed to protect you) thinks it's under attack, so it begins to attack your thyroid. Believe me, it's not a ride you'd ever wish to be on.

I had grown miserable and sick and tired of feeling so sick and tired – all the time. I knew in my heart, something had to change. There had to be another way!

There was.

The Spring of 2015 through the following Spring of 2016 was life changing for me – in one of the most miserable, yet beautifully unexpected ways. I was healthy and strong and had just had my annual physical which, by the way, I passed with flying colors. Life was grand! That all changed in a flash – within a month to the very day – I became completely bedridden! I was suddenly very sick and I could barely move a muscle, let alone my body.

I had no appetite – whatsoever. Lost weight rapidly that I couldn't afford to lose, and my hair was falling out in bunches. I was nauseous 'round the clock. Sleepless nights became commonplace, and my anxiety was out of control. Hand tremors and shaking ruled the day so cooking or writing was nearly impossible. It was all bad, not to mention scary as all get out.

Once I finally understood my diagnosis and learned to embrace this beautifully incredible, eye opening, wild and life changing journey – that eventually led to achieving healthy and happy again – I knew I just had to give it a voice to help others on their journey too.

I also discovered there is little to no information out there in one publication about things you didn't know you could do for Graves' Disease, as you go through it. I had made a promise to myself that if I ever got better, I would find a way to be a resource to others who were silently suffering with the hope of giving them hope.

I got better and I've found a way.

This Summer, I'll be releasing my first ever manuscript turned published book, "There Had to Be Another Way – Things You Didn't Know You Could Do for Graves' Disease" where I take readers and those suffering from Graves' Disease through a practical step-by-step guide of the very same paths that I took to achieve wellness once again.

It changed my life.

I also wrote a Cookbook that goes hand in hand with the Guidebook and the deliberate steps I took when I discovered a completely new way to cook and feed my body well to treat my condition which eventually led to my continued healing and remission. Know this, it wasn't just about eliminating gluten, dairy, and soy products, it goes far beyond that.

I taught myself through trial and error – testing and perfecting – plus many months (which turned into years) of experimenting in what became The Graves' Disease Test Kitchen (from

sunny California to the Philippine islands and back again) that led me to create nutritious and mouthwatering plant-based recipes for my family and me.

The cookbook and the guidebook take you on an unbelievable journey of wellness.

I learned to cook for Graves' Disease and how much food and our food choices affect our well-being. After my Graves' Disease Diagnosis, I was told by doctors that I had only two options to treat my condition along with medication – Radiation Treatment and/or Thyroid Surgery. I couldn't bear the thought of being radioactive or giving up my thyroid and then being forced to be medicated – every day – for the rest of my life to mimic my thyroid. NO thanks. That didn't sound like the life for me.

“I knew. . . there had to be another way.”

AND SO, BEGAN...

This wild, heartfelt, and beautiful journey to wellness through food and lifestyle changes that pushed me from just standing on the sidelines waiting for change to happen to me – to me jumping in with both feet, eyes wide open and creating the change I wanted to see for me.

For perspective, it's not like I was eating unhealthily. I had stopped eating fast food years before I was even diagnosed with Graves' Disease because 'junk' food always made me feel so poorly. That's about the time I also realized there's no such thing as 'junk food.'

There's food and then... there's junk. Enough said.

I was tired of feeling like trash, so I went 'cold turkey' and stopped eating meat, cut out all poultry and seafood and went plant-based. There was no slow transition for me. I was all IN.

I had no idea what I was doing but I was doing it and I've been on this amazing ride ever since that took me from developing simple to gourmet dining – enjoying international dishes from around the world – without ever having to leave the country or my home.

As I began to experiment with fresh garden grown organic herbs, whole foods, real, clean foods – the way nature intended foods to be eaten along with spices and seasonings, things began to change in major and significant ways. All the things I learned, I applied in my own recipe development, cooking and creating because I wanted to see what would happen to me.

My books welcome you to those life changes – transforming from the chrysalis to the butterfly where I learned to let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.

It changed my world.

It saved my life.

For more information, you can follow Grace on Instagram – The Graves' Disease Chef. If you want a freebie Sneak Peek Preview of the Guidebook and/or Cookbook you'll find the links in Grace's Bio