

UPDATE – THE CORNER TURNED, 2014

I didn't know if I'd ever get better. Intellectually, I could imagine getting my health back - leaving such intense, moment-to-moment suffering behind, but viscerally, it felt as far away as a visit to the moon. I could barely remember what it was like to be 'normal' – to not have to cope with every microsecond of every day, but I surely knew that I used to be exceptionally healthy and happy. I was a very high functioning guy. As a board certified emergency medicine doctor, I was chief of our hospital's emergency department. A health freak all my adult life, I was running a hundred miles a month and hitting the gym for weight training regularly. I played rock guitar in a band, and did the best I could as a father and husband. Mostly, I felt good. Sometimes incredibly good. And then, things changed.

I was taking a Tai Chi class in an effort to age a bit more gracefully than hard running and weight lifting might permit. Standing nearly still, moving ever so slowly, a gnawing ache in my upper back muscles gradually made these postures unbearable. I tried to go on, but was so miserable, I dropped out and just power walked for exercise. But that didn't free me from this new monster attached to my thoracic back. I'd have to stop and bend over to try to stretch out my ever-tightening muscles that had forgotten how to work properly. And then both feet started to hurt. But that was only the beginning.

Within a few months, my low back started to ache. Ache turned into severe pain and it was impossible to stand in the mornings without holding on to a stick. It took me several hours of stretching and walking on my treadmill to be able to stand up straight. By evening, all I wanted to do was to relax on my couch. But then when trying to get off the couch, I could barely move. I'd never experienced such stiffness before. About to turn age 60, I thought, 'aging really sucks'.

A colleague suggested that this was not aging but was real disease. He thought I might have Lyme disease. I hadn't given Lyme much thought after diagnosing the first reported case of the Lyme ECM rash in northern California in 1983. It just wasn't on my radar. My standard lab tests were totally negative, but a specialized lab test was floridly positive. I began to search the Internet for information about how to treat Lyme disease and found an avalanche of recommendations from antibiotics, herbals, salt/C, Rife machines, the protocol using Benicar and low dose pulsed antibiotics, homeopathy, diets, heat, silver, allicin, hyperbaric oxygen, ozone, and myriad detoxification approaches. As a scientist and seasoned clinician, what could I make of this? The more accounts of Lyme journeys I found on the bulletin boards, the more chaos I saw. I decided that whatever all those

folks were going through, this was not my life and I would simply get well when I chose the correct antibiotic.

Armed with almost no understanding of what I was up against and having a fool for a doctor, I decided to put myself on high dose oral amoxicillin, which at the time meant about 3 grams a day. I had read about 'herx' reactions and wondered what that would be like. On the morning of day 4, I lost my herx virginity. While sitting at my desktop, I suddenly felt a woozy, buzzing, stoned sensation not unlike the onset of 'bad acid', complete with what I later termed 'visual tinnitus' and within 20 minutes or so, a very unpleasant deeply intoxicated state in which all I could do was to lay back in a recliner and 'go out' for a few hours. But I remained profoundly affected until the next day, when I felt better, though still with my typical pains.

I had two more herx reactions on day 8 and day 15 but by the end of the month, I was not only pain free, but felt like I'd been reborn. I hadn't felt this good in years. Subtle symptoms I'd attributed to a life of sleep deprivation as an ER doc were just gone. I was ecstatic. But who in their right mind would want to stay on 'all these antibiotics', I thought? I decided I'd pursue alternative treatments to continue my path to wellness and maybe to get rid of the tinnitus I'd been plagued with for the prior 6 years.

I tried many things, including silver, allicin, the protocol using Benicar and low dose pulsed antibiotics, followed by low dose antibiotics without Benicar, various herbs, and various extreme diets. My ecstatic rebirth morphed into a fall from grace as I got sicker and sicker. Not only did nothing help, but some made me much worse. Not only did pain return, but the curse of 'brain fog' set in. I was beyond miserable, with no idea of what was in store.

At almost 2 years in to this misadventure, I found myself a real 'Lyme doc'. He was the guy! With a broad foundation in both allopathic and herbal/alt medicine, I surrendered myself to his care and recommendations. He thought my case was a bit odd and doubted that my symptoms were from Lyme itself, but more probably one of the co-infections. I didn't agree based on my initial benefit from amoxicillin, but trusted his experience and judgment. At this point, I was taking low dose antibiotics left over from my miserable time using Benicar plus antibiotics. (It might help some folks, but the Benicar made me quite ill, causing severe muscle weakness and profound symptomatic and frankly dangerous hypotension, all of which resolved within 3 days of stopping it). My Lyme doc advised me to stop all antibiotics, take some naturopathic meds, and 'let's see what happens'. Okay.

About 2 months off antibiotics, I went from the frying pan to the fire. What had been a nuisance disease transformed into a horrid state of near constant torment

with severe insomnia, a continuous body buzzing sensation that was everywhere – on my skin where I could barely distinguish hot from cold, to my insides where I felt as if bottle brushes were being run through every blood vessel of my body. I felt woozy and that ‘toxic intoxication’ I had in my early herx reactions. Two tormenting symptoms with this were a physical sensation of anxiety (without any actual anxious thoughts or issues) and a falling sensation from my mid waist to my legs – a tingly, edgy feeling that screamed for resolution. My only relief would come at night when high dose Ambien and other benzodiazepines induced sleep. The next day was like the day before and after months of this, it was all I could do to not put a bullet in my head. But I would not do that to my beloved wife and kids. I would stay on the cross to keep them from suffering. Plus, it’s my nature to want to know how this whole thing would turn out. I needed to stick around for that.

My Lyme doc had me try one herbal concoction after another, with no benefit. I sent blood to another specialized lab for a comprehensive Lyme panel (the prior one was done at a public health lab). The results were stunning. In contrast to no positive bands on my initial Western Blot screen, I had multiple positive bands for both IgM and IgG. I showed this to my Lyme doc and he said, ‘oh, I guess you do have Lyme disease’, or something to that effect.

I took antibiotics for the next three months and was miserable with near constant herx reactions for about 10 weeks. By the end of those three months, the brain and other neurologic symptoms had cleared and I was happy. Lyme doc said, ‘good, now let’s stop that and mop up with a few months of intravenous antibiotics’. I wondered if I should stop what was working, but I felt so good, I was game to do some *final* bug killing, despite what I’d learned about *Borrelia* developing resistant forms under the influence of the cell wall antibiotics he advised me to use. But I trusted.

I relapsed a few weeks in to the course of IV antibiotics and spent the next five years trying to get my life back with multiple high dose oral antibiotics. I pulled my PICC line after four months and moved on. At that point I knew that my Lyme doc was guessing at what was wrong and had guessed wrong at nearly every juncture so I decided that I’d save some money and do my own guessing. By this time, I was plugged in to a Lyme network of professionals that was an incredibly valuable resource for information, my own education about the nature of the beast, and a connection to some of the top Lyme docs in the world.

With their guidance and an unwavering trust in the power of antibiotics against an infectious disease, I consumed enough antibiotics, often 4 at a time, to sterilize a small third world country. Or, so I thought. I did improve, some. But in the last year of that journey, then 7 years since the beginning, I got worse than I’d been in

years. I did some testing that revealed a C4a level of 25,000! Having dedicated my life to never becoming as sick as my patients, I was now morbidly ill.

Prolonged disability depleted our savings and we were facing economic disaster. At this point I met up with my colleague and friend who had initially suggested that I had Lyme disease years before. He has Lyme and after the failure of prolonged courses of antibiotics, he got well using a Rife machine. He said he got 80% better in the first year, then up to 90% by the second year and went from total disability to gainful self-employment. He invited me to his home to try his machine. I was on antibiotics at that time but 10 minutes in to the session, I felt a herx reaction coming on. The unmistakable (for me) wooziness, brain buzz/fuzz, and a sensation that my perception registered fewer 'frames per second' happened. That was my Eureka moment. That was the day I took my last antibiotic dose – now 19 months ago.

I bought a Rife machine and became connected with my 'Rife coach' who helped me with programming, creation of custom channels, and general guidance in the use of the device. I had one herx reaction after another and was just miserable most of the time. But I'd become a believer and though I'm otherwise a faithless sort of guy, I did believe that I would get better with enough time.

Our finances looking more grim by the day, after four months using the machine, I decided to leave no stone unturned and acquired an even more powerful machine. Bryan Rosner's Rife book described this particular machine as the most potent of the Rife machines for Lyme disease and I felt that I needed all the efficacy I could get. I took delivery of the new machine at the end of January, 2013. My first session was 15 seconds at 432hz, a common starting point, and it induced a massive, nearly immediate, herx reaction. I smiled in my misery and knew, or trusted, that this would eventually get me well. I had to embrace this belief as I was otherwise 'out of bullets'.

Four months after beginning my Rife treatments, I repeated my C4a level and it was down to 7,700.

By early May, seven months in, I began to turn the corner. I was less brain toxic and was sleeping better, needing less Ambien. By the end of that month, I had stopped using sleep meds altogether, and started to query my own medicine network for future employment. Though I hadn't formally worked in medicine for a long time, I spent much of my time reading current medical literature – staying up to date. During the whole time I was ill, I did maintain a small niche practice helping other folks with their Lyme and other challenging diseases. With all my brain symptoms, fortunately I hadn't suffered any impact to my intellect. It was just a sensory nightmare. But now, the nightmare was fading. I was awakening from a very long and very bad dream.

By mid summer, I had lined up two jobs. At one location, I'd do counseling/life coaching and medical admissions and management at a facility that helped people leave unhealthy diet patterns to resolve diseases of 'western diets'. At another practice, I'd do functional and integrative medicine focusing on men's health issues. By August, we moved from our hometown of the past 3 ½ decades to a more populated area with a lot of resources that weren't available in the small town we left.

I was happy! And healthy - most of the time. I wasn't symptom free, but the horrid brain stuff was gone, unless I was herxing from a Rife session, but that usually resolved by the next day. I had my brain back and was/am ecstatic to be out of the hell state that had destroyed my life for 7 years. I was happy to see patients and found myself able to tolerate long workdays without problems.

And now, nine months after our move and 19 months into my Rife treatment, I continue to thrive. I will use Rife machines for the rest of my life as we have no evidence that *Borrelia* can be completely eliminated from our bodies. I still have herx reactions with most treatments, so I know I have a way to go before going to a less frequent treatment schedule, but these reactions are much less intense than in the past. I haven't taken sleep medication other than some melatonin for over a year. I have my life back and my gratitude for those who helped me get here is unfathomable.

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Dr. Sterngold was a board certified emergency medicine physician with 25 years' experience as an emergency medicine doctor. He now practices preventative medicine as well as counseling/therapy/life coaching. He has been a licensed MD for 40 years, and he diagnosed the first reported case of Lyme ECM rash in Northern California in 1983.