

My Mother, My Nurse

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Mother's Day was Sunday. I would share my experience as a mother living with Crohn's disease, but the only babies I've had are the four-legged kind.

In a way, Crohn's affected my choice not to have children. When I received my diagnosis, I was recently divorced, and dating was far from my mind. By the time I achieved remission and was physically and emotionally ready to get back into a relationship, I was 37, and my biological clock was ticking.

I remarried in 2016, a few months shy of my 43rd birthday, and between my age and all the medications I was on — not to mention that any possible pregnancy would be high-risk — motherhood was no longer an option. So, instead of writing about being a mother living with a chronic disease, I'm going to write about how my mother handled my Crohn's diagnosis.

I am totally a mommy's girl. Maybe it's because I'm the baby of the family, but I never ceased to allow my mom to mother me, unlike my two older sisters who were always more independent. If the maternal bond wasn't enough to influence my mother's care for me as I struggled with IBD, the fact that she was a registered nurse made her even more protective and a stronger advocate for my healthcare. This came out especially during my first hospitalization in 2006, when I received my Crohn's diagnosis.

When my older sister took me to the emergency room with a 103-degree fever, we decided to wait to call our parents. They lived six and a half hours away in Oklahoma City, and we didn't want them to make an unnecessary trip. Once I was admitted though, we called them, and my mom took the first flight out. By the time she arrived at the hospital, I had been moved to ICU because my blood pressure had dropped to 70/30 and I'd gone into septic shock.

I remember waking up to her telling me she was there. Then the nurse in her took over. She side-eyed the medical staff as they worked, judging their technique and offering unsolicited advice at times. As new nurses came on duty, I warned them not to be surprised or offended if my mom offered to assist. I'm sure they appreciated her help when it came time for me to use the restroom.

My mom was concerned and anxious as doctors continued running tests to determine what had caused me to become septic and so anemic that I required iron infusions during my recovery. As a nurse, she made sure I received proper care and wasn't getting needless tests or treatments.

She practically had to restrain herself from grabbing the needle after watching one nurse unsuccessfully stick me three times to start a new IV site. When the prep for my first colonoscopy made me nauseated and caused my systolic blood pressure to rise above 150, my mom had it out with the nurse who insisted that my blood pressure was normal.

When I asked my mom what she remembered about my hospitalization, she said, "I had mixed emotions the first time I learned about your Crohn's diagnosis. I was sad, asking why this happened to you, but I was definitely relieved and thankful that the right modern interventions, treatment, and management would heal your problem."

Once I was released from the hospital, my dad returned to Oklahoma City, while my mom remained with me a couple more weeks. She reverted from nurse mode to mother mode, and cooked and cleaned for me so that I could rest after I went back to work half days.

Several times over the next couple of years, my mom dropped everything to come to Austin or extended a visit by a few days to care for me when my flares were severe. Sometimes, I would have to insist that she go home because she couldn't do much except watch me sleep after I came home from work. She was reluctant to leave, but eventually, she saw how well I was coping.

"Knowing your physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual strength, the power of your faith, I knew that you would overcome this," my mom reflected. "As a nurse and a mother, I have faith in science and TLC. A mother's love is the best source of healing."

After my liver transplant, I joked with a friend that the only reason I'm still alive is because I have a tiger mom — I couldn't disappoint her by dying before she did. While there may be a

small kernel of truth in that statement, I do owe my life to my mother's unconditional love and support.

I love you, Mom.

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