

FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

My Journey through Crohn's

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To J.P. Dickey, you pushed me to find my creative side. The lessons I've learned while under your tutelage have carried me far and opened my mind to new and exciting worlds.

To Robert Jennings, you've been my best friend since high school. We've been through a lot and though this world takes us along our own paths, we walk together in Rogue's Phoenix.

PROLOGUE

Alright, so this story started as a blog that I wrote in order to share my experience with Crohn's Disease. It was so rough that my stomach would cramp and twist. I couldn't stand up straight. I couldn't walk across the house without being short of breath. Needless to say I couldn't play with Dylen other than wallowing around on the floor.

I was so irritable that the usual friendly demeanor I projected was a myth to new employees working with me at the hospital. I went from being the friendliest guy to, "Watch out for Tommy, he's a dick." I overheard that exact line while in the bathroom (I was there a lot) from the break room outside the door. I worked with some fantastic people who tolerated me but, and I'm ashamed to admit it, I did have several verbal confrontations with several amazing ladies working as my nurse on the unit. I was put on a positive correction plan for my attitude. This was a sad time for me.

At home things weren't much better. Helen worked evenings and I worked mornings (When they didn't send me home). For dinner I would crawl, literally, into the kitchen and turn on the over. I would lay on the kitchen floor until the beep before putting pizza in the oven. Then I'd lay back down until the times dinged. I'd stand long enough to feed Dylen his dinner before lying back down. I would put Dylen to bed between 7:30 and 8:00. Then I would shower and go straight to bed

myself. I tried to mow the lawn several times but when my would pound within minutes of starting I would be forced to stop. Dabecka was amazing enough to step up and take on the mowing for me.

It was difficult because others didn't understand what was wrong with me. Helen knew that I was tired and sore and fatigued, but it is difficult to explain exactly how this makes you feel to someone who just doesn't understand. Things were expected of me and I physically couldn't do them.

I hope that this story might help you or someone you might know. With that being said, I try to make this story as light hearted as possible with some humor intertwined into the story. Thanks for the support, and enjoy.

CHAPTER - DARK YEARS

This blog is about my dark years. Now don't get me wrong, I was able to assume the happy "role", while in the public. I went to work, visited with family; I went to movies and dinner. I'm getting ahead of myself.

The Setting: our three bedroom house in Lamar, Missouri with my new wife, Helen. We had been married at this time for roughly eleven months. It was fall of 2005. To set the setting even farther let me explain. Helen and I had decided to get married the previous winter and to say our first six months was difficult would be putting it lightly. Losing my father, Tom Clark Sr., ultimately to a heart condition didn't help things.

So we lived together in this pretty good sized home. We did have good landlords and neighbors. We both had decent jobs. I started writing (not novels but scripts). I slept to *Friends* at night and woke to *Eve 6* in the mornings. Then life started to put me through the ultimate test.

I had seen blood in my stools. It had occurred for several days before I finally got over my embarrassment. I laid down to bed and started the uncomfortable conversation with my wife, who I hadn't had too many serious conversations with. I had closed up a bit after dad's death. I told her that something weird had been happening and she inquired. So we had a long conversation of what had happened; why it scared me; and what we needed to do next.

With some conflicts with my family doctor being deployed overseas I had to see a new doctor. This new doctor came into the waiting room (mind you I have not had more than stitches; and I had tons of them; before this visit) where I sat. My knee was shaking, I was sweating. He sat down and asked, "So, what's been going on?"

I spilled it all out. I told him how for over a week I had been seeing blood in the stool after bowel movements. He was a newer doctor and so sent me to the hospital to get a stool collection kit and set me up an appointment to get a Colonoscopy. Let's start with the kit.

This kit came in a brown paper bag. Inside the bag were several small plastic bowls, several large q-tip style devices and tubes to hold them. Now let me tell you how much fun it is playing in your poop as an adult; It's not. I had to collect my poo in this plastic hat thing, dip the cotton stick into it, swirl it around some, and then place it in the tube. I had to do this for four bowel movements within a weekend. Then I had to collect any two of these brown-red masses in these plastic bowls and KEEP THEM IN THE FRIDGE. Try explaining that one to the wife.

"Hey Babe. Did you get take out?"

"No!? Oh, Don't open that!"

Then I was sat up with a doctor wishing to give me my first of many colonoscopies. I was given a sheet explaining how to prepare for the procedure.

Step 1.) Don't eat for 24 hours prior to the procedure. Now this is tough enough in itself. You can eat Gelatin, but Gelatin sucks.

Step 2.) Take an ounce of Fleet enema before bed (Do not throw up). This can be done by mixing the enema with other stuff. So I thought I would mix it with a chicken broth, to cover the taste. Bad idea! It tasted horrible. I barely forced it down. I plugged my nose and just kept swallowing. I'm not gonna lie, the feeling was there, but I kept it down.

Step 3.) Do what comes natural. It took about an hour to kick in, but once it did the bathroom became the location of a natural disaster area, the President came by and made a declaration. The United States was at war with my toilet. For close to several hours I sat on the stool, staring at the beige wall; Grunting through the urges.

Step 4.) Take the other ounce the following morning prior to going to the hospital. Same rules as before. This time I chose to mix it with something a bit less. broth-y. I mixed it with flat sprite. I shook it up so that when I drank it I wouldn't absolutely hate sprite. It worked because to this day I still can't drink chicken broth.

After taking the second dose Helen took me to the hospital to meet with the doctor wanting to shove the six foot long plastic tube up my butt. We didn't start off on a good foot. I won't mention the name of the doctor or, hospital for that matter, because their misdiagnoses almost cost me my life. After the doctor explained to me and Helen how the procedure would go and he had a nurse start the IV (By the way, I hate needles). They gave me a local anesthesia that didn't "knock me out" but instead "caused me to not care or remember the procedure". Yeah right! I came to in the middle of the "procedure" and made eye contact with the Doctor. He gave me a frightened stare as I said, "I can feel that!" and I passed out. The entire time I felt I was in a dream that I couldn't wake from. I had severe cramping in my stomach. I wanted to throw up, but couldn't wake up to do so.

When the procedure was over the doctor left me to wake up, which took a while as Helen told me. When I returned to the follow up the next week the doctor told me that I had something called Ulcerative Proctitis. This is caused by different things

including; inflammatory bowel disease, bacterial infections; or in the case suggested by my doctor, anal sex with one carrying an STD. This doctor simply told me, with my wife in the room mind you, that he believed I had anal sex. If that was the truth this doctor wasn't aware of the social tool known as tact. That could be an awkward doctor visit.

Doctor to patient:

"You have Ulcerative Proctitis, it will go away with time. By the way, you caught it by letting a dude get up in your back side."

Wife to patient:

"Slut!"

So I was sent home with nothing more than a "Good luck" and "Wait it out". So I returned to my life, thinking that I had acquired this condition by some sort of bacteria (I had to look it up to find other causes... Thank you doctor douche-bag). The condition worsened a bit, making me have to use the restroom roughly once an hour. I moved on with my life, moving to a department store for employment so that I could begin to obtain a 401k and insurance (For some reason I felt the need to grow up). I started working in the lawn care area and was in the sun a great deal of the day. As the summer hit I started feeling tired and fatigued. I went to my doctor and got checked out. With him not having any knowledge of my previous situation, and I not smart enough at the time to revisit it, he stated that I was dehydrated and suggested I drink some Gatorade. So for roughly a week and a half I tried the Gatorade, oh so much Gatorade.

Mid-July I found myself at work, sitting off in the corner until a customer came by. I would help them to the best of my ability then I would crash again. My heart pounded, I was short of breath. I had to stop and take a breath before returning to the back of the store for break. I was throwing up twice a day.

I was a hot mess. So, I called my doctor once again and spent my lunch break at his office.

I was sitting there, slowly dozing off in the waiting room when the nurse called my name. I stood up, shook off the light-headed feeling I had and followed her back to the room in the back. My doctor stepped in and his exact words were, "We need to get you into the hospital." My eye lids were white, I was malnourished, and I looked pathetic. The doctor told me to go home, pack a bag then go to the hospital and have them admit me and start an IV. He was going to come up later in the day to see me.

I went home, went back to my room, sat at the computer desk and cried. Helen came into the room and asked what was up. Through the tears I told her what the doctor had said and expressed my fears. I had never been admitted into the hospital and was so freaked out. Needless to say Helen was able to convince me to go, so I went.

I was admitted. The doctor showed up with the results from my blood draw. My hemoglobin was a 3. Now to explain the hemoglobin. Hemoglobin (Hb or Hgb) is the protein in your red blood cells that carries oxygen. A low hemoglobin count is a below-average concentration of the oxygen-carrying hemoglobin proteins in your blood. The average hemoglobin is a 12; needless to say I was severely anemic. In fact my doctor explained that I was the lowest he had ever seen a hemoglobin level on an individual that was still attempting to work. Prior to myself, he had seen one other individual with such a low hemoglobin level, and he died soon after. So now I am extremely nervous.

I was set up for my second colonoscopy. The prep for this scope was a bit different. This time I was set up to take this gallon drink. They called it "Go Litely". If you have ever had to take it you know that it has quite the opposite effect. They first offer a flavor packet; don't take it, it doesn't help. They offer a cup of ice, now this is a good idea. They make this drink last roughly two hours, in ten minute intervals. Cup by cup, I drank it. I choked it down, and managed to not throw up. After a quick 30 minutes it started to work and yet again I spent close to three hours afterward sitting on the bathroom

toilet. After this I was exhausted (It's amazing how just going number 2 over and over would wear a guy out).

The following morning, I was prepped and ready for my second "butt raping" as it has been joked of many times. They put me on a gurney and began wheeling me down the halls. At one point they stopped the cart and slipped something in my IV. I started to doze off and can't quite remember much of the following several hours. When I woke up after the procedure, and realized that I didn't wake up during, I felt pretty good. Then my doctor came in and ruined my mood. Because I was so inflamed they could only take the scope up about 6 inches. At this point they noted that my condition was severe. Still, my doctor diagnosed me with Ulcerative Colitis; much more severe than the proctitis I had previously been diagnosed with. UC (Ulcerative Colitis) is in many ways the same as Chron's disease. In my case I had a severe case but it was specific to the large intestine. This is why I was diagnosed the way I was. Over the next couple of years I will have been diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis and then Chron's Disease several times.

Moving ahead in my story here, During this hospital stay I was given several units of blood. Due to my unique blood type I would normally have been considered, at that time a prime donor type. But also because of the rarity of it, O negative, it was difficult to obtain blood for my transfusion. Of course since then many medical professionals now believe it to not be the universal donor type due to the lack of antigens. Regardless, at the time I was given enough blood to raise my hemoglobin but then I started to react to it and my entire body broke out in just a matter of minutes. I was itchy everywhere. After a couple of minutes of doing so, Helen asked what was going on. I told her I was feeling itchy and she told me to push the button. When the nurse arrived I explained how I was feeling and she called for the miracle drug, Benadryl. So I get a shot of the miracle drug and then I have myself, my wife and a nurse scratching me. It was intense.

After this hospital stay I was sat up with a monthly appointment with my doctor and for several months was starting to show signs of remission; remission being [the period during which the symptoms of a disease abate or subside](#). They set up

another scope for the fall. This scope allowed the surgeon to see far enough up to determine that my entire colon was infected with the Irritable Bowel Disease. I was placed on a medication called [Sulfasalazine](#) to help with the inflammation. It didn't have much effect on the condition but because of the "just in time" detection and blood transfusion I started to get to feeling better. All this happened just in time for the birth of my first child, Dylen. It was amazing and so is he. He is truly a blessing and this is where the story takes an even darker path.

CHAPTER - DARKER DAYS

Dylen was born on October 17th, 2006. Helen woke me up at 2:00 in the morning and we were on our way to Freeman Hospital in Joplin, MO. I drive like a grandpa and Helen still jokes about how I asked her if she would rather I speed. We made it to the hospital in time, and spent several hours preparing for the event. With Ellen DeGeneres on the television, Dabecka and I held Helen's knees back as we told her to push, I tried not to pass out, and Helen grunted through the pain, since the epidural had worn off. I thought I would start this blog with a lighter situation; lighter for me, anyway.

After visiting with my doctor, my family decided to relocate so that I could reinvest myself in school. With the birth of Dylen, holding three jobs to pay the bills was no longer my top priority. So we packed up our bags and moved north. We moved from the small town of Lamar, MO to the even smaller town of Windsor, MO. I was hired on at the behavioral hospital there in town. Nervous as I was, I managed to do my best, and seemed to have found my calling. I had assumed that I would work there for a few months while I attempted to gain employment at a video store as manager (I won't mention the name out of respect for the franchise). When that didn't pan out, I

continued to work as a mental health technician. It didn't take long for my condition ([Chron's](#)) to worsen. This time it returned with a vengeance...

"You think you can get rid of me? I'm gonna make your life a heavy number two!"

It was always there, the blood in my stools. But after a while, I started to notice more; and then the cramping started again. So I found myself hospitalized for the second time due to my condition. I drove south to my doctor in Lamar and he set up my third colonoscopy. This seems like a great time to discuss the prep for these procedures.

More often than not, these days, gastroenterologists tend to lean toward the "Go Lately" (the prep for cleaning out one's system). Here are my tips for those of you who have to prep for this in the comfort of your home. First off, find something to keep yourself busy; don't watch television, it will just get you down. I would suggest grabbing a favorite movie or television show on DVD. Place this DVD in your laptop and put a table near the bathroom. Don't think you can sit in an extremely comfortable place, believe me, it won't last long anyway. Once you are prepared and near the bathroom, go to Sonic (or any place that sells their gator-style ice). Get a large cup (if you get the ice at Sonic then buy a Route 44 sprite and there you go). Keep this large glass of water ice cold. This will pay off soon. Then keep the extra ice, you're going to need this as well. Keep the "Go Lately" as cold as possible, and keep a straw nearby. I'm not talking a small convenience store straw. I mean the large straws used for shakes or something. Now you're ready.

You are supposed to drink eight ounces of this stuff every ten minutes. So here is what you do: You take the drink, ice cold, and place the straw to the far back of your mouth. Draw it in and swallow. Don't think about it, just do it. Then, once you finish the cup, chase it with a lot of ice cold water. Keep this large cup of ice water as full as possible and down as much as you can. Then turn on your show or movie and set a timer for 10 minutes. This will allow you to put your mind somewhere else for the remaining ten minutes. Once this stuff starts to kick in, nothing else will matter. You will barely have time to leave the stool to refill your cups, so at this point you may just want to

bring your little table into the restroom. After the last drink of the "Colon as clean as a whistle" drink you have another hour or so of in-and-outs with the bathroom. They'll slow down. At this point I would suggest heading to bed. Get comfortable, but not too comfortable, and relax as much as possible. Your body will most likely be worn out from this massive poop-a-thon.

Get as much rest this night as you can, and don't eat or drink after midnight. There are reasons for this; and if you mess up, your procedure will be postponed until later that day— if not rescheduled entirely. I can promise you that this day and the night before are the worst part of the colonoscopy.

CHAPTER –

"I'm sorry. There's nothing more I can do for you."

I heard these words from my primary physician at the age of 25. After trying all of the natural alternatives (probiotics and a blend of vitamins) my doctor attempted to help me with my Crohn's; which, again, at the time was still being called Ulcerative Colitis.

He had me on a strict regimen of pharmaceutical cocktails. Dump the mixture in your throat, drink plenty of water, eat a small snack and try not to throw up. I was on 36 pills a day, divvied up into three servings plus a pain pill and sleeping aid at bed time.

When this didn't work, we tried a medication called Remicaid (extremely new, dangerous and expensive at the time). I didn't die at the time (the percentage of fatal side effects was higher than you would think). I suppose that's good; except now I would find myself light headed with labored breathing. Within an hour of the shot I would slowly begin to stiffen. Eventually

my hands, wrists, and elbows would lock up. It was pretty scary. Needless to say, we had to stop this medication...

Which brings me back to the beginning.

"I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do for you. I'll call and set you up with a specialist." The conversation continued.

Choking back tears, I listened and tried to remain calm. My doctor told me that the next course of action was to work toward surgery.

And tears...

So then I meet a gastroenterologist and began the cycle all over again. He put me in for another colonoscopy (we won't go over that again) and replaced several medications. We struggled to balance out the anemia, ulcerative proctitis and dehydration that came along with spending so much time sitting on the toilet.

Still having no results, I was then set up with a surgeon. Along the way I had to fight through a spat of shingles.

Now *there* is an experience.

If you've never experienced this delightful condition (it is so hard to convey tone. Pretend I sounded sarcastic just then), let me enlighten you. The first couple of bumps made me think zits. Then, as I began to get them across my forehead and down my chest, I started thinking prednisone rash.

Then when a nurse at work said to go get checked out, I started to wonder.

The next morning, I called and got an appointment with my gastroenterologist.

As I drove up, the itching grew unbearable. Having to stop several times due to the irritable bowel syndrome that typically accompanies UC, I discovered the little red bumps were spreading even further-When a man gets little red-itchy spots near his object, he starts to get a little worrisome. At this point it began to cross my mind that I was about to venture into an unpleasant journey.

The doctor stepped into the room, looked at me and left. Several minutes later, he came back in holding a sheet of paper and said, "Take this over to the hospital. They're going to check you in."

And thus it began.

Once at the hospital, I was immediately shoved into the world's smallest known hospital room. I could stand and reach out to touch both walls of the room. I guess in [hindsight](#), I was in a private room, which anyone in this situation would appreciate.

I had [shingles](#); and not just a typical shingle case, but across my entire body. I had shingles on shingles. I was blistered and itching, doped up on pain killers and Benadryl.

Once, I managed to escape my room and get down the hall before a staff member saw me at the elevator and ushered me back in. I joked (I wasn't truly joking) that I was going to ninja my way out of the room. The doctors laughed and asked to take photos of me for a medical journal.

So every morning, my doctor and four grad students came into the room and observed the spectacle of me in my underwear. I was on display for the masses of white coats with their clipboards and cameras.

There was one particularly pleasant night when the IV drip machine went off, beeping incessantly. It woke me at 4:00 am.

I paged for the nurse to come and reset it. The nurse's desk responded by saying that there would be someone down in a couple of minutes.

Needless to say, it didn't happen. The machine kept beeping.

I was trying very hard to have patience. I paged down after about five minutes and the gentleman at the nurse's desk told me that they were in report and someone would be down in just a few minutes.

No one ever came.

I was beginning to lose my patience (Many of you already know that Tommy has plenty of patience to spare.) and so I thought I would share the enjoyment.

I opened my door and shoved the machine into the hall. Then I closed it, pinching off the IV tube. It took literally 15 seconds for someone to make it up the hall to reset it.

I guess the moral of this story is: never give up, be resourceful, do what has to be done.

CHAPTER - DAWN: THE DARKNESS SUBSIDES

Alright... By a show of hands - who still itches? Once I survived the shingles (which at times were worse than Crohn's disease) I was still dealing with the pain and fatigue. Finally my doctor chose to set me up with a meeting to discuss surgery. At this point Helen and I already made up our minds that we needed desperately to move forward with it. The doctor then went on with explaining how things would work.

When Crohn's or UC leads to surgery they have to do a few things. After the eight colonoscopies I was told that I was so inflamed that they could not get the camera up high enough to see where it ended. The answer to this was to perform a capsule endoscopy. To do this I had to go to Columbia, Mo. and spend the afternoon while a nanobot (capsule camera) worked its way

through my most private of body places. As this happened I had to carry a black box belt and try to find something to do. My friend Kyle went with me and we managed to salvage the day. Still though, when I walked into the mall and other stores I was afraid someone would see the bulging metal box strapped to me and assume it was a bomb. I tried to act normal, continuously tucking in my shirt and hiding the ever so obvious wires. Finally, the capsule and I parted ways and I was able to go back and get checked out.

The results to this test were pretty interesting. This is where I learned that I did in fact have Crohn's Disease but it was affecting only my large intestine (this is good news). Crohn's could affect a person from anywhere between the anus and small intestine - and on rare occasion can also be found as high as the esophagus. With it being limited to my large intestine they felt that surgery could help me.

Surgery time was upon us. I was scared to death. My Doctor set me up with a surgeon (whose name will remain anonymous due to a lawsuit that ultimately caused him to leave the field) to perform the procedure. In hindsight that sort of made me nervous in itself. I was told how the procedure was going to go. Once I went through yet another evening of bowel cleaning, I would go in for an early surgery. I was told of what they would do. They would put a three inch hole in my stomach that they would use to remove my colon. Then there would be a one inch hole cut for a drain tube, then two small incisions for the tools. If the surgery went as planned they would have left just a few inches of the colon that is not infected and use it to create a j-pouch. This is where they fold the small intestine on itself to create a make-shift colon (I'm sorry but I still think that it is cool for a doctor to say make-shift in reference to the inner workings of the human body).

"Okay buddy, So we're gonna jack her up on the lift and check out the undercarriage. If we can replace the muffler out, we'll make a couple of quick welds near the axel at the front and near the rear. If not, we'll make shift an exhaust tube that will lead to the sides just under the rear housing."

While I was under, unannounced to me the doctor found no useable colon, but there was absolutely no disease on the small.

His backup plan started. They cut out my colon and clipped the inside of my anus shut. Wow...this is starting to sound like the beginnings of a filthy joke. Leaving a small portion of anus so they could attempt to repair me at a later date, they then routed my small intestine to the side of my abdomen and rolled it on itself much like putting a pair of socks together. This little area forms what they call a stoma. They sewed it to my skin and duct-taped a bag on it. Not really, but close enough. An ileostomy bag is a plastic bag with a gasket. The gasket attaches to an adhesive patch with its own gasket and then the *Band-Aid*® like adhesive sticks to the skin. With this comes its own problems.

When I woke up the doctor told me what happened and that with any luck the bag was temporary. So I didn't worry myself over it. I figured that it would all work out.

Have you ever had an organ of any sort removed? By a show of hands, who has... Oh good, several readers out there. Trying to stand for the first time after this procedure was by far the most uncomfortable (aside from the colonoscopies of course) I have ever been in my entire life. It was the feeling that the rest of my organs felt the need to sag into this void where I once toted around my "2".

It felt much like the feeling of a sleepy leg after laying on it for a four-hour D&D® (see earlier posts for the description of this... essentially it solidifies the fact that I am and always have been a nerd) session. My entire front felt saggy, which my stomach was. Walking put such pressure on that area that I felt like I could throw up.

So the doctor saw me walk and gave me a prescription for Percocet and sent me home. This leads into our next section here...

Segue...

I understand why people could abuse medication. The first day I woke up at home I was in sooooo much pain and so I took

the suggested dose of 2 Percocet. I then laid down on the couch, in too much pain to move. When the medication took effect, just under an hour later, I felt so great that I went to the computer and began typing on Rogue's Phoenix book 2. The Percocet initially made me feel decent with the lack of pain. Then, my head began to lighten. Before long I felt so great and motivated that I spent just over an hour typing straight through. The medication wore off and I went back to the couch and the comfort of Fallout 3 (I had to play while Helen was at work because soon she would be home and take over the console).

For three days I did this. At the end of three days I have fifteen chapters typed up and off to Robert for review. I sat back and thought, "Wow, maybe being home on surgery leave was just what I needed. I could get use to this." Then it hit me. It was the pills. Because of the relaxation from the pills and the addition of worry free thought... I felt so motivated. I told myself that I couldn't let myself get hooked on this routine. The pills would run out and so would my motivation. So, I put the pills up and only took them when the pain was too much, and even then I only took half the prescribed dose. When I saw my doctor he prescribed me more for the pain, I informed him on how they made me feel and my concerns and the plan I had in effect. He was impressed with me. He told me that he is always concerned when he prescribes these heavy pills, that people will abuse them.

So, I managed to get some work done while on leave. As I got to feeling better, and still had four and a half weeks off, I was able to get some more work done (of course not nearly as much as in that first few days). Now, this last little bit of blog here was sort of out of left field... I put this in because of the message I feel is so important. Please be careful with prescription medication. Many people don't know the dangers of misuse and abuse of these.

Chapter - Thing were looking up

After a period of time, six-months, I believe, I was taken back in to check out my stub of an anus. After I came to from this sedation I was informed that my anus was still heavily infected and that there would be no going back. So, I became a cyborg. From this day forth I will forever place my "2" in a plastic bag on my side.

Something to be said about an ileostomy bag. When you have no colon you also lose control of your bowels-true story. I returned to work and would run groups on the floor with the patients. When a room is quiet and everyone is listening to you, a simple fart can ruin any emotional and powerful message you may have. For several years I had this issue.

I sat in a meeting one time with several higher-ups in the company. It was quiet. No one was talking. Out of nowhere I felt the urge-just in time to grace the entire room with my passing of gas. Not knowing how to explain, simply said, "Don't mind him. He's always talking crap."

It broke the ice, and allowed me to explain my condition. I have sense become more comfortable with this bag and it hasn't been as much of a bother as I once feared it may be.

Some people fear it will ruin an intimate relationship. It won't. With my wife and I having such love in our relationship it was not a problem. In fact my enjoyed the random farts for quite some time, thinking it was funny that I had no control-and also razzing me for being so self-conscious about it.

Some say a person cannot swim or shower normally. Now, there is some truth to this, but I use a shower hose wherever possible to keep the bag from getting prematurely wet. I recently found that I can swim with it on and the bag will still last several days. It hasn't been a problem-most days anyway, and I am thankful to be alive. The alternative was much worse.

I have been a belly sleeper my whole life and the hardest thing that still bothers me years later is that now I am a forced side and back sleeper. I use a body pillow to assist me in this and I haven't had too many "accidents" over the years.

There has been a few nights where these "accidents" have happened one the less.

"Babe, Can you wake up?"

"Why?"

"I pooped the bed again."

I hope that this series has helped anyone out there who deals with something similar and will show that there is a light at the end of that very dark tunnel. Keep your head up and press on. You can get through this. Positivity and a strong support group will help. Surround yourself with good people. You are not alone.