

Miss Diagnosis
by Beth Mckim

It is with extreme trepidation that I begin to write this. The details are painful to remember, and I am highly superstitious. It's almost as if re-telling the events could reverse the previous results.

This saga began when I was just 22 years old, working my first job as a social worker for the county welfare department. One day, while eating a quick lunch in the basement of our workplace with co-workers and supervisors, I took a large bite of a sizzling hot piece of Church's fried chicken and to calm my burning throat, took a big swig of Coca-Cola. The next thing I knew I was under the lunch table hearing people up above frantically discuss the seizure they had seen me have, just before they loaded me into a county ambulance and drove me to an emergency room. I protested the whole way that it was just the chicken and the coke.

After a full day of testing for everything from epilepsy to a brain tumor, they released me to go home with a written diagnosis: *Thin, 22 year old Anglo woman fainted from eating fried chicken and drinking a coke in rapid succession. All tests normal.*

The next major episode happened in my thirties at a routine physical with a convenient doctor on my insurance plan. I knew nothing about fasting for blood work, so I stopped by my sister's apartment on the way and ate sweet and sour chicken she had picked up for us, and drank a coke. The office called me to come back two days later and told me I was a diabetic but could control it through diet. They sent me home with a packet of information and strict instructions to eat no sugar.

One year later and ten pounds lighter, I returned, fasting, and the miraculous news was I was no longer diabetic and not even close. In all the years since, no doctor has mentioned diabetes to me.

And then there was the time a doctor at a local clinic told me with a great degree of certainty that I had ovarian cancer and referred me to the leading specialist in Houston at that time for the disease. After a round of testing and questions, a nurse ushered me into a penthouse type office fit for a queen and introduced me to the guru of ovarian cancer. Her first question of me was "Exactly how did you get in to see me?" I nervously answered, "A clinic referred me."

"Well, you need to go home and thank your lucky stars you don't have this." Feeling elated on the one hand but somewhat intrusive of this "top doc's" time, I rather sheepishly skipped out of her office and re-entered life.

And then there was the time I went for a routine chest X ray. Two days later, a girl who sounded twelve years old, called me. " Ms. McKim, I regret to inform you that you have a mass on your lung." When I picked myself up off the floor, I asked what I was supposed to do. "Well, now , you must go get a CT scan to see how bad it is."

Now, mind you, I have always been a non-smoker, an extremely healthy eater, a daily exerciser, and a by- the- guidelines patient. The news could not have shocked me more.

Two CT scans later (the first one showed a different lung mass, not the one on the original X ray.), I was given the all-clear sign both then and upon my return six months later.

Two years ago, while standing in an outdoor line for a concert at a dance hall, a bug flew into my left eye and caused it to swell. On the following day, an eye doctor prescribed a strong antibiotic and eye drops. It turned out I was "allergic" to both. When I returned to the doctor, my eye had suddenly crossed and sagged. They rushed me immediately to an imaging facility where I was tested for a brain tumor and stroke. With negative results, my next stop was the "top" neurological ophthalmologist in the city or the country. I can't recall which.

With an entire team of students, this very effusive, professorial doctor enthusiastically diagnosed me first with Ocular Myasthenia, that would most likely progress to Myasthenia Gravis, a debilitating disease of the nervous system. When his written diagnosis arrived in my mailbox, he had upgraded me to full- on Myasthenia Gravis and warned me to stay off the treadmill, not to swim alone, and basically wait for the disease to grab me.

Funny thing is I had never felt better. Some friends took pity on me and scheduled me to meet with the rock star doctor of Myasthenia Gravis, the first one to treat people in the city of Houston. They checked me into the hospital for three days of evaluation for the proper treatment. I was alarmed to see all the other patients on my wing either in wheelchairs or on stretchers. I had tests performed that day I never knew existed. For example, I was "electrocuted" on an exam table while my husband stood by my side trying not to laugh, but doing so anyway.

I was practicing Yoga on the floor when the team of doctors entered the room around noon on the first day.

"Ms. McKim, " the rock doc told me, " You do not have Myasthenia Gravis or any other neurological disease and I highly doubt that you ever will. Go home and quit worrying." I made him knock on wood while I did so as well.

About a month later, a top eye surgeon put me under general anesthesia and uncrossed my eye. To this day, I know the bug was the culprit, but nobody believed me.

And last year, something showed up with my blood, showing I might be a free bleeder. This time, my top doc specialized in hematology and oncology. After further blood work, I received news that I have blood that clots too easily, and the specialist was convinced I had blood clots in my legs. An ultrasound showed that my legs were fine.

There were others , like the time my primary care doctor proclaimed I had Trigeminal Neuralgia, a disease so painful, it's also referred to as the "suicide disease." After six months of anti-seizure medication, I was thrilled when, instead, a cracked tooth finally showed up on an X-Ray.

I have known true happiness over the years, each time a grim diagnosis has been reversed. I'm sure I'll get blindsided with accurate bad news one day, when I least expect it . I'm hoping all the rehearsals I've had will ease the pain, but I don't think it works that way. Maybe I'll just have the good fortune to go in my sleep, sometime down the road with no diagnosis, no fuss.