

My Name is Christina Olson

MY Journey Towards Healing –

I will never look at Mother's Day the same for as long as I live. Sounds cliched....I know! But after you read my story, you'll come to realize how unpredictable life can be and how in an instant your world as you know it can change far beyond what you would've ever imagined.

Personal Details - My name is Christina Olson and I'm a mom of two boys, now age 6 and 8, a wife of a very supportive husband, and a public-school elementary Teacher.

Life Before Kshar Sutra Treatment:

Living with a debilitating disease is just debilitating and not living. In fact, it steals almost everything from you. Most importantly, it steals the part that makes you smile, laugh and look forward to things. It takes away your ability to function in a normal world and takes over your mind making it hard to think about anything else except for the disease. What began as discomfort on and off for years after giving birth to my first

child, became increasingly more painful. Having to go to the bathroom became quite stressful for the pain would radiate for hours afterwards. I tried living somewhat of a normal life while seeking medical advice in the United States. And not just anywhere in the states but in the mecca of medical care, New York City. I saw multiple doctors none of which fully examined me. All appointments brought the same diagnosis; anal fissure and I needed a sphincterotomy. The pain became unbearable and I decided that was my only option after listening to so many opinions. What was described to me as an “easy peasy” surgery turned out to be the surgery which ultimately confined me to a bathroom. The pain after the initial surgery was worse than before. I knew in my heart my outcome was not good. My “easy peasy” fissure developed into a trans-sphincteric fistula as a result of the surgery which later branched due to the inability to correctly diagnose and treat in a timely manner. The day after... became about emptying my bowels, multiple sitz baths, followed by manually milking my body to rid it of the infection, followed by more pain, the inability to leave the bedroom and then the complete inability to do normal tasks. The weeks became about trying to heal after another surgical attempt but, I couldn't make it more than 3 weeks without being so terribly

ill that my doctors started to tell me it was in my head and I needed to start to seek psychological help. Really? You question yourself...could it be? Could the pain be in my head? Could it be that I just can't tolerate pain because I am an "emotional woman"? Could I be causing unnecessary surgery after unnecessary surgery because of my complaints to my doctor? Life was passing me by as I remained confined to my bedroom and bathroom questioning not only my physical health but my mental health as well. I made use of my time scouring the internet for a successful cure. At times, this also made me feel better because I would come across SO many similar stories, SO many similar lives being shattered that you realize you are not alone. My relentless research uncovered so many horror stories about what I was facing and the challenges that would be ahead. I can't tell you how many times I sat in the tub reading about the low percentage success rates and failed operations in the US (less in the UK but still not worth the flight). I began to realize through my global searches, that inadequate techniques, and the low availability of appropriate medical imaging devices that specifically target FISTULAS are missing in Western medicine, but not in India. I started to realize that my 3 "piercings", rectal drains, that "I should learn to live with"

weren't acceptable. As my search for a cure continued, I became so much more knowledgeable and I had committed the percentages of results for recommended procedures (surgical procedures) to memory and could speak to the top CRS doctors on the subject without being intimidated. My searches and research began to appear in my mind like a puzzle. The more pieces of research that I discovered and put together formed a picture in my mind that pointed me in a different direction. Sometimes, I'd read about a procedure using a VAAFT (Video-assisted anal fistula treatment) or STEM cell therapy (both of which are not approved in the USA) and I wondered why these were not available. Why weren't TRUS (Transrectal ultrasound) exams done prior to EUA (Exams Under Anesthesia)? I'd like to speak with the FDA about that as one of my doctors told me it's all about the buck, too bad the buck wasn't being applied to what I have.

Look for Kshar Sutra Treatment:

I briefly came across an article about this Kshar Sutra treatment in India. This led me to a blog and a mention of a Facebook group. I guess I was joining FB after all this time to learn more. I met people from all over the world through

Facebook that had already received treatment in India with success, people who were currently undergoing medical treatment, and people who were planning their journey. The success rate is approximately 99.9% effective out of the staggering numbers treated. I could not have imagined such success rates when looking at the available options to me here in the states. I thought about that “no matter what” piece, how brave these people were to travel across the world to a “developing” country to receive medical treatment, how brave to leave their families, how brave to leave their jobs, how brave to leave what life they had left, and how brave to undergo treatment that isn’t FDA approved which we as Americans are taught to believe is actually there to protect us. I questioned this procedure in India thinking it had to be a scam. I searched for other New Yorkers, people from Jersey whom I offered to pay for their time and trouble just to meet me in person. How could it be that we live in a country such as USA but need to leave to go to a “Developing” country to get a “normal” life back? I had reached that “no matter what” piece. No Matter What I was going to get better, No Matter What I am going to get my life back, No Matter What I am going to be a mom to my boys again, No Matter What I wasn’t risking another failed surgery in the United States, No

Matter What I wasn't going to let another surgery in the US make me incontinent to the point where I couldn't return to a so called "normal" life, No Matter What I wasn't letting them put in a colostomy bag with the risk of having another failed surgery to now realize that the colostomy bag is now permanent, that NO MATTER WHAT cost I was going to do what I had to do to return to a "normal" life. This disease had stolen my job which provided the necessary financial income for my family. It stole my ability to care for my children, Anthony (5yrs) and Nicholas (7yrs). IT STOLE MY LIFE and it wasn't acceptable to me at 41 years old to learn to live with this disease. Besides all that one might say "But you were alive". Only when in these shoes does someone realize the difference between being alive and actually living. These 6 past surgeries had left me with 3 rectal drains, constant leakage, and the prospect of lifelong antibiotics, not to mention the pain. I was in too much pain to even drive or sit. I was weak, sick from the infection, unable to go out or attend any functions even at my children's school. I was frail and I was not living.

Beginning of Journey Towards Healing:

And so, my journey began. After reading numerous success stories and doctors' profiles, I carefully chose to email Dr. Bhat to see if he could help me. Dr. P. Ramesh Bhat, BAMS (with Gold Medal for first rank), MS (Master of Surgery), DPh (Diploma of Pharmacy), PhD (in Ayurveda from B.H.U), has many years of clinical experience successfully treating over 10,000 patients for Fistula-in-ano, hemorrhoids, fissures, etc. He has also received numerous awards and distinctions, taught in numerous Ayurveda Medical Colleges, and is well published. Dr. Bhat asked me for a brief history, scans and a photo to which he replied, "Generally outcome is good. I feel I can treat you. It takes 3 months for complete course of treatment. You need to be in Bangalore, India during treatment." "Just come." And so, we went, with a lot of prayers. I had been diagnosed with a Trans-sphincteric Fistula that had branched. Within two and half weeks, I planned my trip to Bangalore, India, with my husband Drew. This included finding air, hotel, getting vaccinated, getting check-ups, transferring guardianship, gathering funds, finding family to take over our lives while we were gone not only physically but financially as well; all while ill. I continued with my CRS appointments who informed me that they

would not treat me if I was to go to India. The treatment in India is not magical. The treatment requires a skilled, caring, compassionate, knowledgeable physician. Dr. Bhat is all of that and more. He genuinely cares for his patients; he is humble and to this day he still keeps in touch. (In contrast to my US surgeons who never followed up after my surgeries nor called me to find out why I did not return for a follow-up visit.) I was truly blessed to find Dr. Bhat. It is not for the faint hearted and it is quite different in its care and approach to US care on so many levels. As soon as we arrived at 4am, we checked into The Oberoi hotel. We soon came to realize that this hotel would become our 2nd home and most of the staff would become our 2nd family. We ate breakfast, put our bags in our room and off we went to Dr. Bhat's to get a script for a TRUS exam with Dr. Shankar. With little sleep and traveling for the past 30 hours, I was terrified while waiting to see Dr. Shankar. I was not used to their practice of medicine nor had I had that much time to plan for what to expect. The simplest things such as leaving your shoes outside in the waiting room, your spouse not being allowed in with you, using a toilet that was nothing but a hole in the floor, with no toilet paper to wipe just a handheld sprayer was all an adjustment, Then add the language barrier, exposing yourself

once again to a room full of strangers examining the 3 rectal drains I showed up with and then to have them probe you while you have all these drains still coming out the exit hole they are entering. Somehow you do it. Somehow you get yourself up on that table and hold back the tears as you suspend your legs in the air. Dr. Shankar was wonderful. He was patient. He saw me starting to get overwhelmed and would stop. To be honest, I didn't want him to stop, I just wanted to get it over with. It took all of my strength to get through this appointment and I knew this was just the beginning, I left there with my scans and a layman's drawing so I could understand just what it looked like. Had it not been for that spider on the ceiling, I don't know how I would've made it. "Why?" you ask. IN every visit you had to find something to occupy your mind, take you away, help you breathe and in this case it was secretly cheering that spider to make it to the next tile all while telling myself to breathe in and breathe out. We then brought my scans back to Dr. Bhat where I finally got to meet the man who was going to treat me, whom I traveled halfway around the world to see. He was kind, quick, reassuring, but also told me the worst case scenarios. He did not ask for money or go over the logistics. He was there to help me but I still left feeling uneasy. In my

heart I knew I was in the right place, I knew I had to trust him but there is still your left brain rationalizing and analyzing every little thing. Even to the point where he says show up tomorrow night to the hospital and we will operate first thing Sunday morning...YUP Mother's Day. Doesn't give you much time to think it over but why else did you travel all the way here. So you go. We show up at the hospital the very next day for pre-surgical testing. Technology looks like it's from the 50s. Paper charts, beds with 4 posts, no pillows, blankets from someone's house, mattresses as thin as paper, ceiling fans, and only one room in the entire hospital with air conditioning...if that's what you call it. I often mention "we". I was lucky enough to have my husband by my side for my entire trip. He was and is my rock.. He gave me the push I needed to keep going some days, the confidence I needed at 3 in the morning that everything is going to be ok., the strength to change the dressing after a bowel movement, the reminders to breathe, and some days the ability to not to have to think because he did all the thinking for the both of us. I know many do without a partner. I feel honored and privileged I never had to try. Well, surgery is done (Complete gut, removal of drains, and insertion of thread), packing is in and I see his nurse, Anjali (An Angel) every day for cleaning

and packing, Three weeks later Dr. Bhat changes the thread and this continues 2x a week for the next month and a half. At which point, Dr Bhat informs me that I am Fistula Free. FF comes with a surgery to cut the thread out and cauterization of the area with no anesthesia. OH MAN but you are FISTULA FREE. After being pronounced FF, the last 3 weeks involves cleaning, scraping, daily packing with oils or cow urine and wound care only found in India. Until that one magical day you see Dr Bhat and he tells you to go home. You don't need to come back anymore.

Feeling of Joy (Back to Normal Life):

Feeling of joy, feelings of fear...is he sure I can go?...feelings of the unknown ...will it return? It leaves you feeling very unsettled. You want to run home but at the same time you are afraid to leave. The main point is as I write this 1 year after my journey began, I am Fistula Free. This is not the end of my journey. My healing continues and although this is spectacular news, I still have a long road ahead, more so mentally than physically. I am far better off now than I was when I first arrived in India, let alone how I was in the United States. I am learning my new normal and how to live.

I have realized that healing is an intricate process which incorporates multiple variables that must be in sync and two of the most important variables are, one the doctor, Dr. P. Ramesh Bhat, and two the part that involves, the support and prayers of your family and friends. Thank you to all of you that pray for all of us! I know I'm doing it. I hear your stories, I think of you, I pray for you. I pray for your recovery and that you too can find health and peace in India. The friends we made in India from all around the world will be friends of mine for life. We share a special connection/bond.

"Enlightenment", they referred to it... the people, the family, the friends, the friends of friends that surround someone, that surrounded me and my family with prayers, positive thoughts and endless support that has been an intricate part in helping my body heal. For I truly believe, you helped cure me. Thank you all for everything you have done to make me and my family feel that there are truly genuinely good people in the world that care about you (me) especially when you feel like you are so alone. Thank you for giving me the strength and courage to go on each day and not succumb to the life I was offered by my doctors here in the US.

Thank you for helping me get my life back! I will be forever indebted to Dr. Bhat, my doctor, who forever changed the way I look at Mother's Day.

Namaste,

Christina (and Drew) Olson

Email me anytime: christinaolson20@gmail.com



Mother's Day 2020 marks a year of my having undergone surgery #6, but my FIRST in India, halfway around the world from my home. Spent 3 months following that surgery, India would become my new home. Traveling to India to seek medical treatment, including surgery, may sound like something that you would never do "no matter what", but it saved me, my life, my well-being and the well-being of my family.