

Interview with Tami Brady, author of *Strategies: A Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia Journey*

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is pleased to be joined by Tami Brady, who is here to talk about her new book, "Strategies: A Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia Journey."

Tami Brady earned a BA and MA in Archeology before turning her interests to alternative medicine, largely due to her own issues with infertility and being diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. Today she provides whole health therapy sessions to help people with Fibromyalgia and infertility issues. She is the author of seven books, the latest of which is "Strategies: A Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia Journey."

Tyler: Thank you for joining me today, Tami. I'm intrigued that you've written "Strategies" as a memoir. To begin, will you tell us a little bit about your own journey dealing with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia?

Tami: Great to meet you, Tyler.

In 1996, I was readying myself for a new phase of my life. My children were all now in school and I was planning to study for my archaeology degree. That winter, I had more than the usual number of the flu and colds, which I attributed to stress: my job, readying to go to back to school, and my father-in-law's impending open-heart surgery.

That spring, I got another bout of what I thought was the flu. This one knocked me completely off my feet. I could hardly get out of bed each morning.

Unfortunately, it wasn't the flu. I spent the next year being shuffled around from one specialist to another trying to figure out what was wrong with me. By the time, I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia my health had deteriorated. I hardly slept, I was in constant pain, and my legs collapsed on a regular basis.

It took me a long time to deal with my conditions. I was angry and frustrated but probably my biggest hurdle was all the denial and self judgments. I saw my health issues as a sign that I was weak and a failure. So instead of listening to what my body was screaming to tell me, I just kept pushing myself hoping that the pain and fatigue would dissipate on its own.

Perhaps that's the most important lesson for those of us who live with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. We spend so much time and energy berating ourselves for what we can't do and the lives we were forced to leave behind that we forget about the gifts that we are given through this experience. Our fatigue and pain makes us choose what's really important in our lives. These symptoms force us to be more loving and kind to ourselves. If we allow them to, they can even show us a better, more content, fulfilling existence.

Tyler: Tami, is there a relation between Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia? Can a person have one without the other—does one cause the other?

Tami: The general definition of Fibromyalgia is chronic pain. One of the diagnostic tests for Fibromyalgia is the presence of pain in a majority of particular trigger points throughout the body. Actual symptoms vary from person to person including localized pain; heaviness or weakness causing mobility issues, swelling of the joints; memory and thinking impairment (fibrofog); and a myriad of other problems. Between four to eight million individuals

suffer with Fibromyalgia in the United States alone. Some estimates suggest that 5% of the population actually has Fibromyalgia.

Another million people have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. A large portion of individuals who have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome also have Fibromyalgia. The most common symptom with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome is intense fatigue, often coupled with unrecuperative sleep and chronic insomnia.

In my case, my Chronic Fatigue Syndrome symptoms often exasperate my Fibromyalgia issues and vice versa. Far too many times a string of sleepless nights has heralded a wave of back pain or intense pain in my hip that has made it impossible to get any sleep.

Tyler: Tami, why do you think it took so long for the doctors to diagnose you with Chronic Fatigue and Fibromyalgia, and how did you know they were correct when you were finally diagnosed with it?

Tami: At present, there are no definitive tests for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or Fibromyalgia. Moreover, since many of the symptoms are shared with other conditions such as accidental poisoning, problems with the thyroid glands, Lupus, Multiple Sclerosis, and the like, it is extremely difficult to determine that someone has Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or Fibromyalgia. Essentially, a doctor has to discount every other possible physical solution. Then, after psychological evaluations are complete, they can finally look to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. Unfortunately, for now at least, it's just a long frustrating process.

To be honest, when I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia, I didn't believe it was a real condition. I thought that it was a made up nonsense that the doctors told people so they could ready themselves for having Multiple Sclerosis. The reason I thought this was because my aunt had recently been diagnosed with MS and her symptoms seemed a lot like mine.

It wasn't until many years later that I came to accept that I did indeed have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. This change of heart came mostly from reading books about these conditions and interacting with others who have the same issues. Even though some of the actual symptoms that we experienced were slightly different, the locations of pain nodules, the type of pain and fatigue, the progression and duration, and the triggering mechanisms of these experiences were fascinatingly similar.

Tyler: Why did you decide to write "Strategies"?

Tami: Strategies gradually evolved into what it is today. It started out with lists and notes that I took with me to all my doctor appointments in those early years. Later, as I started writing a personal journal, my writing became more about expressing my feelings in a safe way. Finally, I formally began to analyze my symptoms and try to find strategies to deal with them.

It was at this point that I started working on the actual text for this book. At first, I had no intention of publishing my words. I simply needed to understand my own story. I had a lot of deeply hidden emotions and insecurities that I needed to acknowledge so that they could be released.

Being so very open and honest was a pretty scary prospect. In truth, I think I was afraid of who I might find hidden underneath all the overachieving bravado that I had built up over the years. Still, each time I sat down to write, I felt another piece of a huge burden lifted from me. I began feeling content, more peaceful, and even a little joyful.

Eventually, I knew that I had to share my story with others. Not because I was in any way special but to validate the journeys of everyone who has been touched by Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. Our symptoms and our personal paths might not be exactly the same but having these conditions impacts our lives in a way that we couldn't have imagined in our wildest dreams (or nightmares as the case might be).

Tyler: Tami, you actually are very involved in the alternative health field. Do you credit your own medical issues with your interest in alternative medicine?

Tami: Yes, very much so. I believe that the universe sometimes gently nudges us in just the right direction. I'm a little (okay a lot) stubborn, so I needed a pretty big push.

I loved being an archaeologist. I really enjoyed traveling around the countryside and hiking in the back country looking for artifacts and remnants of archaeological sites. I also liked the fact that everyone knew what an archaeologist did for a living. I never had to dread the “What do you do for a living?” question. It never failed, the moment I said I was an archaeologist, the person I was talking to would begin telling me about their favorite Discovery episode. It was a great icebreaker!

The major problem with archaeology (apart from the physical strain) was that I had to pretend a lot. I had an image to uphold which was extremely limiting. Not only did I have to fane that I was in perfect physical and mental health, I felt obligated to adhere to a specific range of beliefs and ways of behaving.

As I gradually grew to love and accept myself, I realized that I didn’t have to act a certain way to be a good person. I didn’t have to impress anyone but myself. My opinions counted and my personal truths were just as valid as the next person’s.

This new line of thinking led to experimenting with alternative health methods such as Reiki and various traditional forms of spiritual healing, which eventually led me to whole health therapy. Right now, my practice focuses primarily on Energy Psychology (Reiki and various form of traditional spiritual healing) as relates to Fibromyalgia and infertility. My current Ph.D. research is looking to expand this therapy to include aspects of Jungian Theory (archetypes, shadow work, and dream therapy), Awareness Therapy (meditation and awareness), and Popular Self Help Psychology (journaling, self love, manifesting, and belief analysis).

Tyler: Will you tell us about the worksheets in the book, their purpose, and the best way to use them?

Tami: The worksheets at the back of the book are copies of those resources that I originally made for my own use. I have found them invaluable for keeping me organized, getting me through my worst days, and gaining some understanding about the progression of my symptoms. For ease of use, I have organized these pages into three types: strategy forms (to help keep track of various symptoms and strategies to alleviate these issues); keeping upbeat (to record inspiring quotes, affirmations, and anything else that will help on those tough days); and getting organized (to combat the effects of fibrofog and reduce the frustration of looking for important information such as types of medications, health care contacts, and doctor’s appointments).

There really isn’t a right or wrong way to use these forms. I have included copies of my own completed forms at the end of the book if anyone wishes to see the types of information that could be included in these charts. However, my best advice for readers, especially when using the strategy forms, is to fill out the sections as honestly as possible in order to gain some understanding of the various symptoms and what types of things work for them.

Tyler: What are some of the most prevalent symptoms a person will notice if they have Fibromyalgia?

Tami: Unfortunately, the symptoms of Fibromyalgia (such as localized pain, muscle weakness, and memory issues) are shared with a number of other conditions ranging from accidental poisoning and problems with the thyroid glands to Multiple Sclerosis and Lupus. It really isn’t easy to determine if a person has Fibromyalgia. It is for this reason that most individuals with these kinds of symptoms have to endure a battery of tests and examinations before any sort of diagnosis is determined.

Tyler: Our reviewer, Paige Lovitt, mentioned that she also has Fibromyalgia, and that like yourself she was an overachiever, which seemed to exasperate the situation. Is Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia something people can create for themselves due to pushing themselves to do too much?

Tami: This is one of those things that no one seems to know about these conditions. It seems to me that the majority of individuals I talk to with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia are extremely busy, overachievers. For a number of years, I actually believed that I had somehow caused myself to become ill.

Then, I came upon some material that looked at other conditions that are commonly associated with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. The ones that stuck out for me were Endometriosis, Renault’s Syndrome, and allergies. I suffer from all three of these. Suddenly, I realized that I might have actually had a predisposition to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. It became clear to me that even though my overachiever attitude obviously made my symptoms worse, I hadn’t caused myself to become sick.

Tyler: Paige also mentioned that some people in the medical field still tell people that Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia are only in their heads. What response would you give to people skeptical about the existence of these disorders?

Tami: This is probably one of the worst parts of living with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. Often the symptoms of these conditions are invisible to the average person so most people don't even realize that we are sick. Therefore, when we mention we have health issues most people are shocked. The first reaction for many people is disbelief, even within the medical community.

My advice to all individuals with Chronic Fatigue and Fibromyalgia is to talk to others facing the same issues and arm yourself with knowledge. Join a discussion group or a local support group, read whatever books or articles you can find. You will soon realize that you are not alone; remember there are millions of us out there. Make use of these resources to build yourself a solid support system and above all keep looking for health care options that will fulfill your needs.

Tyler: If a person thinks he or she does have Chronic Fatigue and Fibromyalgia, how should they go about getting diagnosed with it? Should they start with their local doctor, or are there specialists or specific hospitals a person should visit for treatment and diagnosis? Where did you finally get diagnosed with it?

Tami: Most people do start with their family doctor and are then referred to various specialists as they go through the testing process. Afterwards, some individuals team up with medical professionals who specialize in Chronic Fatigue and Fibromyalgia for their care and management. I personally started the process with my family doctor who referred me to a variety of different specialists. The final specialist, who gave me my diagnosis, was a Sports Medicine professional.

The sad truth is that at present going through the process of testing and getting to the heart of your health issues can be a very frustrating experience. So my best advice to people who think they may have these conditions is to find a health care professional with whom they feel comfortable. Having someone who will really listen to you, answer your questions, and work with you is invaluable. Don't be afraid to look around for someone who fits you and your needs.

Tyler: What sorts of responses have you received so far for the book? I know you received an endorsement from Bob Rich.

Tami: I have been overwhelmed by the positive support from both the medical community and people living with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia. I have received numerous emails from people, who like myself, pursued medical or alternative medical careers because of their own Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia experiences.

I've also had the privilege of having others share their stories with me. Some lift my heart: those who found the courage to leave a loveless marriage, left a stressful career behind, started a business, let go of grief, and found the courage to face childhood abuse. Others make my heart ache: people feeling frustrated, completely alone, and unsupported by the medical system.

Tyler: Will you explain a bit about whole health therapy? Are you an advocate of holistic health practices? I think some confusion exists about holistic medicine as being outside accepted medicine. What concerns if any, should people have about holistic medicine?

Tami: Whole health therapy is a methodology that works in conjunction with other forms of health care. In my practice, I focus on Energy Psychology (Reiki and various forms of spiritual healing) which is useful not only as relaxation and coping techniques but also as a means to enhance self healing.

I am an advocate for finding what works for each person. Some individuals will feel quite comfortable looking to complementary, alternative, and holistic health care options. Others may find it a little uncomfortable or ill suited to their personal beliefs. My best advice is to follow your intuition and do whatever works for your particular situation.

Tyler: Tami, I know this is not your first book. Will you tell us a little bit about some of the other books you have written?

Tami: “Strategies” is my seventh published book and my third title with Loving Healing Press. My first book was “The Complete Being: Finding and Loving the Real You.” “The Complete Being” is a guide to the healthy development of the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of the self. Readers are encouraged to use the included exercises to understand their genuine nature and move towards fulfilling their dreams.

My second and third titles, “Blame and Judgment” and “From Lost to Found” were books of poetry. As a way of sorting through my feelings, I write poetry. Sometimes dark, sometimes full of hope, these pieces illustrate my personal journey thus far.

My fourth book was “Regaining Control: When Love Becomes a Prison.” This resource was made specifically for those suffering from dependence issues. This issue is near and dear to my heart. Due to my health issues, I’ve often worried about keeping my independence while accepting appropriate help. Moreover, I come from a long line of strong women who found themselves in abusive situations due to unhealthy dependence.

My fifth and sixth books are training manuals for the first and second levels of Usui Reiki Ryoho, the traditional form of Reiki. These books include full instructions and the attunement needed to undertake Reiki sessions. The final two books in this series are set to be published by this summer.

Tyler: It sounds like you will be busy for a while, but once your two more books on Reiki are published, do you have plans to write more books, and what are your professional plans in terms of your medical practices?

Tami: I will most definitely keep on writing. Writing is one of the many gifts that I uncovered while on my Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia journey. It allows me to be creative and share my life experiences with others. I actually start to feel like something’s missing in my life when I’m not writing for an extended period of time.

In the meantime, I will be completing my Ph.D. research and will look to integrate my findings into my current whole health therapy sessions. Likely, this will include meditations, journaling, awareness therapy exercise in association with my current Energy Psychology sessions and the use of techniques such as dream work, shadow work, belief analysis, and manifesting.

Tyler: Thank you for joining me today, Tami. Before you go, will you tell our readers about your website and what additional information they can find about “Strategies” and your other books?

Tami: Thanks so much, Tyler. You can find out more information about me, whole health therapy, and my books on my website at <http://www.tami-brady.com>. My books are available at Amazon, Barnes and Nobles, and other fine retailers.

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