

She Had Chronic Lyme Disease for Years. Now She Shares Her Story

By Andi Shae Napier

Gwen Wilcox was wearing flip flops as she walked a trail in Santa Cruz, California. It was 1986, and Gwen and her 1-year-old son had just moved to Bethany Bible College for the fall semester of her freshman year. After returning home from her walk, her roommate told her she had something on the heel of her foot. When she looked down to brush it off, she didn't even realize it was a tick.

It took her 28 years to learn that she became infected with Lyme disease that day. Year after year she visited doctors across California, searching for an answer to her chronic illness. She leaned on her faith and family as she went through severe depression, fatigue, and pain. There was an invisible string though, guiding her to the treatments she needed; an invisible string God used to nudge her onwards towards a healthy future. It took 30 years to reach that future, and it all started with a walk through the trees, and a tick on her heel.

Almost immediately after the tick bite, she started experiencing flu-like symptoms. With ceaseless body aches and fatigue, she he struggled through the first quarter of the semester. Wilcox was drowning in inexplicable sickness and schoolwork, all while raising a 1-year-old by herself. Once the quarter ended, she and her son left Santa Cruz to return home to Bakersfield, California.

Despite the pain she was still feeling, Wilcox began working full time whilst going to school on her lunch breaks. After leaving work, she'd teach piano lessons to make extra money. She was still going through intense exhaustion from her schedule and illness, so she visited a doctor at home, only for them to misdiagnose her Lyme disease as mono.

“Then they said, ‘No, you have chronic fatigue syndrome. And then you have,’ I mean just like, all the things. And they would just slap an antidepressant on it just to take care of the pain or whatever it was,” she said. “It was always like, kind of a pitiful bandaid, and never getting to the bottom of the situation.”

She explained that the Lyme’s bacterial spirochete is able to camouflage, which makes it easy to misdiagnose. “It can drill into bone, it can drill into cartilage, it can drill into organs, and it hides. It hunkers down. It’s like, oh you’re gonna give me an antibiotic? Okay we’re gonna go into dormancy mode.”

For years after moving home, she continued to struggle with repeated misdiagnoses and was left running in circles, her invisible’s string nowhere to be found. In 1988 she got married, and in 1990 they were blessed with a daughter. It had only been four years since her tick bite. Motherhood was one of the biggest challenges she faced due to her lingering depression and limited physical capabilities. Her Lyme not only took away her health, but it took away even the mundane activities with her kids.

“And the kids, of course they helped a lot and they understood on those mornings where I was just like, in a coma on Monday morning and they’re getting ready for school and Kris is helping Kait get ready. I feel like the worst mom ever. The worse mom,” she explained.

“And so I’ve had to deal with a lot of guilt over that in number one I was always sad because I was dealing with depression. Physical- like *physical*- yes, you know? And then I couldn’t always keep up and do what I felt like a mom should be doing, you know?”

Wilcox never received an accurate diagnosis for her Lyme, and that left her oblivious to the fact that her Lyme could be genetically transferred.

“I had really surrendered it [her illness]. I had given up until Kaitlyn called me one day from college and she said, ‘Mom I can’t keep going.’ This symptom, this symptom, this symptom, she just listed it off,” she said.

“It was me. She was telling my physical story that I was at the moment feeling.”

That was the moment God’s invisible string finally began to tug; an extended family relative who had been diagnosed with Lyme in 2001 reached out to Wilcox about the similarities in their symptoms.

“We’ve been so grateful, but she connected us with a Lyme literate doctor- one who knows the appropriate tests to do that will get the correct results,” she said.

“And again, it was something too; doctors were hard to find because they would lose- they would have their license removed if they claimed that you had chronic Lyme.”

For decades, Lyme disease went misunderstood. It was widely accepted that the treatment for Lyme was a four week course of antibiotics, and because there was no further knowledge on the disease, there was no reason for insurance companies to consider any other treatments. These stumbling blocks are what led her to discover the ‘trifecta’ of people God gave her to heal.

From the family-recommended doctor, Wilcox and her daughter began once-a-month Lyme treatments in Thousand Oaks, California. “The treatment it just flattened me. And I just got so broken over being unable to like just carry groceries to the car,” Wilcox said. “I was like oh God oh God oh God I’m just praying. I’m begging Him help me get to the trunk. Help me get to the trunk. It was so stupid but like, I was so weak I couldn’t do normal things.”

After a year of treatment, her daughter, Kait, had recovered from Lyme, but Wilcox still felt sick. Her depression intensified and she felt she was fighting through a darkness that had a

hold on her mind. Her physical pain was only worsening in her joints, too, making it hard to even stand. “Kait was really pretty good. She was like ‘I feel like I’m good to go.’ I did not. So we stopped the treatments in Thousand Oaks and I continued to pray,” she said.

The invisible string began to unravel itself through unorthodox methods of treatment. From the Thousand Oaks treatments, Wilcox stumbled upon another Lyme literate doctor who balanced out her thyroid and hormones levels. Eventually, the doctor was able to direct her towards an electrician who ran a treatment center in his backyard.

The low-key treatment center held everything from electromagnetic frequency generators, pulse electromagnetic frequency mats, hyperbaric chambers, and oxygen treatments. “It was just this electrical business- he had a little side building and God dropped me in there and I went and I did those treatments once a week for over a year for free. He never charged us.”

From the electrician, she found a holistic doctor who told her to start taking supplements. Finally hopeful for recovery, Wilcox diligently took her prescriptions for months before returning for another Lyme test.

“She tests me and she said ‘you don’t have Lyme anymore.’ I thought I was just, I was in shock and I said to do it again do it again cause I didn’t believe her!” Wilcox says. “She did and she goes you don’t have Lyme. So after that- and then you know, I start crying, but after that it became managing it.”

Wilcox had finally begun recovery from Lyme, and God never left her side, always guiding her forward and leading her through the darkness. That was one thing she claimed to have learned from it all; that God will guide you and give you what you need, no matter what.

“Things are seasonal and you just trust that He will equip you with what you need for the day.

With your strengths for the day, your grace for the day, your joy for the day.”