



ARTHRITIS INTROSPECTIVE

UNITING PEOPLE WITH ARTHRITIS DURING THE PRIME OF LIFE



The Gathering

Fall 2009 Vol. 3

We're Growing Stronger Everyday!

Here we are in our third year and we are proud to say that we are growing by leaps and bounds (in spite of those achy joints)! Our mission is to create a community for those living with arthritis in the prime of life and part of that mission involves collaborating with other organizations sharing in our vision. We are proud to say that over the summer, Arthritis Introspective (AI) participated in the national Juvenile Arthritis Alliance (JAA) conference in Houston, TX assisting with sessions on relationships and networking. We Spend time with families of JAA and build relationships with new younger adults, it was exciting for all, and, by the end of the weekend, we had several new AI members and two new AI Facilitators. Visit the Arthritis Introspective web site to see pictures of all the fun we had!

Moving forward...



The Arthritis Foundation (Northern California Chapter) and Arthritis Introspective invite you to a day of education and empowerment focusing on issues affecting those living with arthritis in the prime of their lives who are thriving through life's milestones. Whether you were diagnosed with arthritis at 2 or 32, we all struggle with managing relationships, insurance, careers, chronic pain, and loss of mobility.

The Young Adult Education Day will focus on



Arthritis Introspective in Houston 2009

finding positive ways to take control of our disease by learning coping strategies from holistic approaches to disease management, working with "the system", and making critical life-decisions. Join us in sharing your challenges and triumphs with others who have been there and develop life long friendships. You will enjoy:

- Learning about your rights, including access to technology, education, employment, health care, and transportation.
- Exploring the healing power of laughter with humorist and motivational speaker, David Jacobson www.humorhorizons.com. Learn positive ways to manage stress, anger, depression; address relationships, self-esteem, intimacy issues and much more.

When: Saturday, Nov. 14th; 10:00am – 4:00pm.

Where: Washington Hospital; Fremont, CA.

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AI Board members will be there, and after the event, we'll spend the night seeing the sites of fantastic San Fran. So why not join us and make a weekend out of it? For more information contact Kevin Purcell at Kevin@arthritisintrospective.org.

Mark Your Calendars for a weekend of fun and friendship!
The 2010 Gathering "El Festival de Amistad - The Festival of Friendship"
Friday, April 9 – Monday, April 12, 2010
Tempe, Arizona-Courtyard Marriott

AI began with a conference, and group of us meeting and sharing our experiences in a hotel lobby. The 2010 *Gathering* continues that tradition with the addition of more informational sessions.

El Festival de Amistad will include social and educational sessions on Attitudinal Barriers, Art Therapy, Alternative Therapies, Spirituality, Coping with Depression, Pharmaceutical Advancements, Relationships and Dating, Intimacy, and 3 breakout sessions given by men with arthritis, women with arthritis, spouses, significant others, caregivers and friends of those with arthritis.

However, we all know the best information comes from simply sharing our stories and we will have plenty of time for socializing. For a little after hours fun, we have arranged for glider rides, accessible sailing and, of course, some nightlife festivities.

With nine Support Systems now in place and more on the way, we look forward to meeting many new AI members and proving that no one has to live with arthritis on their own.

For a complete schedule of events and to register, please visit www.arthritisintrospective.org.

You Can Dance If You Want To

When you think Belly Dancing, the last thing that may come to mind is, arthritis. How would a body wracked with pain, stiffness and deformity perform a dance based on fluidity and constant motion?

Well, Erica Stotler, AI Facilitator from Richmond, VA. has found the answer.

At Arthritis Introspective (AI), we celebrate those daring to push the boundaries and shatter the stereotypes attached to those living with a disability. We challenge those who would say, "How can you do that with your arthritis?" For Erica the response is literally, "Watch Me."

"I was diagnosed with RA when I was 8-years-old. I was never very athletic, as I could not engage in most physical activities without my body reprimanding me. This changed in 2002 when I found the wonderful world of belly dance. A friend had been dancing and convinced me to try a class. I didn't want to go alone, so I talked another good friend into joining a beginner's class with me.



Erica in costume

We both loved it, and wished we had tried sooner!

Currently, I take lessons in Tribal style belly dance. The dance is low-impact and joint-friendly, which is perfect for me. I always let the instructor know about my RA, since it affects my mobility; for certain moves I need to be taught a modification that works better for me. But even if I have to sit back and watch, my fellow dancers understand that I am not being difficult. I feel like I have more energy when I can get to a class on a regular basis (although this doesn't always happen). Once, my doctor asked what I had been doing, when I told him I'd been belly dancing he said it must be working for me, and to keep it up! And along with the physical exercise, belly dance has given me the opportunity to make lasting friendships. Fun and exercise can really happen together!"

When Erica dances, she does wear shoes, even when performing. She avoids floor work as it's hard on her knees and admits to having some trouble with the Toxim style, which involves a combination of hips, abs, knees, and thighs. Therefore, she compensates by relying more on her knees and thighs, lending her own style to the mix. But it's not

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just the exercise that Erica loves, it's the entire idea of performing in costume, the music, the feeling of camaraderie with her classmates and fellow dancers and her ability to surprise people when she tells them, "I'm a belly dancer." She's even turned her love of the dance into a family affair, spending every Saturday with daughter, Lotus at Mommy & Me Belly Dancing class.

Erica continues to have her battle of the wills with arthritis. She was out of work for nearly eight weeks this past summer and will soon celebrate the second anniversary of a major back surgery. Yet she does her best to remember that, "This too shall pass" and when things get really rough, she "gets some giant tattoo to make me feel better." Not only does she dance, do yoga, and mother a busy toddler, Erica was recently featured as one of Richmond's 40 Under 40 for her work with AI and providing support for others living with "Arthur." For those making a difference, we celebrate Erica, and, oh yes, we are watching!

If you would like more information on Erica's AI Virginia Support System or just want some more advice on belly dancing with arthritis, visit www.arthritisintrospective.org or visit us on Facebook.

Toasting to Tori—AI Member Spotlight

When Tori McBride, an Emergency Department Social Worker from Seattle was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) at age 25, she feared that the life she had was over. "I was scared, in pain and overwhelmed by all the changes RA would bring to my life." Like so many young adults diagnosed with RA, Tori felt very alone. "No one seemed to understand what this diagnosis meant to me emotionally. Nor did they understand what it was like to live with the day-to-day pain I had been in for months," she says. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance; Tori experienced the Five Stages of Grief that most people go through upon being diagnosed with a chronic illness like RA. "Looking back, it was a very difficult time for me. I did a lot of crying as I went through the grieving process."

However, Tori did not let her grief or "Arthur" get the best of her. Knowing that knowledge is power, she turned to the Internet, finding as much RA information as possible. She came across an ad for the 1999 National Young Adults with Arthritis Conference being held that June in Tucson. Feeling alone and in search of answers, Tori booked a flight to Arizona. Little did she know how that weekend and the friendships formed there would again, change her life. "I felt truly inspired. I was newly diagnosed, in pain and was trying to wrap my brain around living with a chronic condition. I realized that I had to take it one day at a time and that no matter what life dealt me I would try to handle it with grace and determination like those around me. I also came to realize that the diagnosis, although life changing, did not change who I was and what I wanted out of life."



Tori & Chad in Houston 2009

Since that first conference, Tori has become an active member of the arthritis community during her prime of life and brought husband Chad along for the ride. In fact, just as Tori was learning to navigate life with arthritis, she was also beginning a new romance with Chad. From the start, Chad supported Tori however he could, helping her through major flares and joining her in becoming a member of the community. Participating in national events, Chad was able to meet other caregivers and partners and together, Tori and Chad learned about life with Arthur as they learned about life with each other. "I think every time Chad and I go through a flare together it makes us closer and reminds me of what a great person and partner Chad is," Tori explains.

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Now married for over six years, Chad and Tori often speak to groups about Relationships and Intimacy. And Tori admits that even now she “tends to feel guilty when I have limitations and have to rely on Chad more. I think communication through it all has been really important.” She goes on to explain that, “fatigue, physical limitations, pain and schedule conflicts due to doctor’s appointments are all issues that affect our relationship at any given time.” Yet arthritis is just a small part of Chad and Tori’s life together. The inspiring couple are also parents of two active little boys, Colin and Nathan, who keep them very, very busy.

After 10 years Tori has learned how to best manage her disease and how to keep herself healthy. “I go to the gym religiously to stay active and keep my body moving. I find that this helps me physically but also emotionally even when I am flaring.

Tori’s friends and family include her “arthritis family” and the Arthritis Introspective support system. “Initially [meeting others with RA] helped me to accept the diagnosis and all that it could mean for me, but it also helped me gain hope for the future. Now that I have a network of people with various forms of arthritis and experiences, I know that there is always someone who has gone through what I am going through or who can give me words of encouragement or advice. If I have any questions about medications, need to cry or just need someone to talk to, I know that there are people who ‘get it’. I think most importantly that it has taught me that I am OK just the way I am and that life with RA is going to be just fine.”

Form a Support System in Your Area!

What IS an AI Support System?

- A place to find information about arthritis, providing information, resources and emotional support.
- A social network, providing fun, affordable and informative events to its members.
- An empowering community of people living with arthritis, dedicated to providing a safe, confidential place to share your feelings while sharing positive coping strategies and finding the best way to navigate life with arthritis.

What Does a Facilitator Do?

- Facilitates meetings ensuring a positive, respectful and comfortable atmosphere to those attending.
- Coordinates fun and engaging events, from pot luck dinners to group outings.
- Leads group discussions, promoting and allowing honest and confidential discussion on both the trials and triumphs of living with arthritis.
- Communicates with other AI members to ensure that all members are getting the support and positive experience intended.

Words for the Dark Days
 Life is an opportunity, benefit from it.
 Life is beauty, admire it.
 Life is a dream, realize it.
 Life is a challenge, meet it.
 Life is a duty, complete it.
 Life is a game, play it.
 Life is a promise, fulfill it.
 Life is sorrow, overcome it.
 Life is a song, sing it.
 Life is a struggle, accept it.
 Life is a tragedy, confront it.
 Life is an adventure, dare it.
 Life is luck, make it.
 Life is too precious, do not destroy it.
 Life is life, fight for it.

Arthritis Introspective would like to thank the generous donors who keep us going.
 The Tucson Arthritis Support League
 The Ability Center

For information on forming or joining an AI Support System, register for The Gathering or the San Francisco Education Day, participate in the AI discussion forums, make a donation and much, much more, visit www.arthritisintrospective.org.

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