

OPINION



the Astorian

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An Astoria endometriosis story

As a nurse wheeled my gurney through a busy hospital hallway, my eyes opened. It took a second to remember where I was when I heard the familiar voice of my husband at my side.

The first question to come from my lips was the same one that had raced through my mind hundreds of sleepless nights: “Did they find anything?”



NIKKI
DAVIDSON

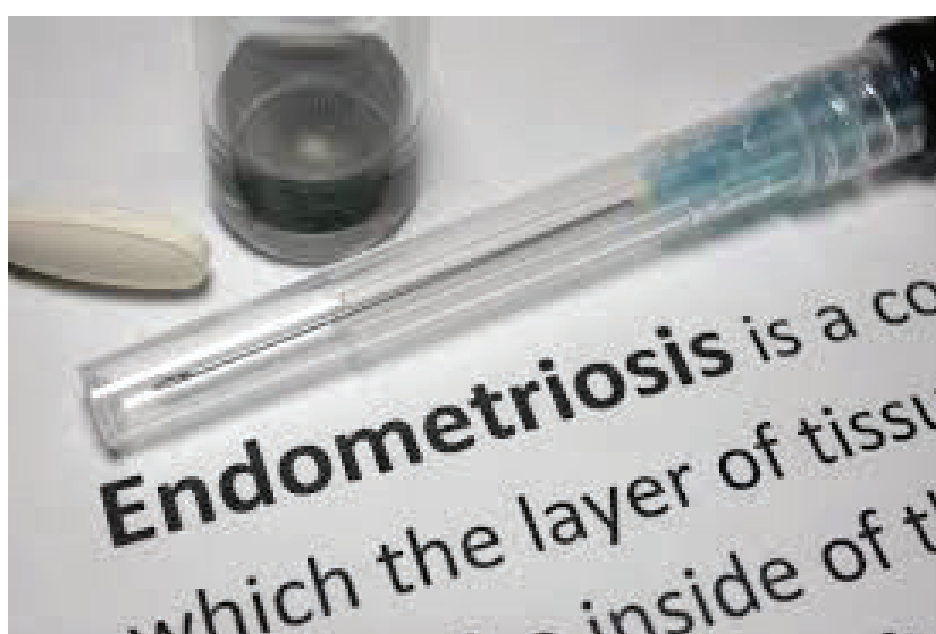
It took me years of appointments and eight different doctors to finally get this diagnostic surgery. Despite my fear of needles and being sliced open, I counted down the days until the procedure

like an elementary school kid waiting for the start of summer vacation. All I wanted was relief from my pain and to finally know why it was happening.

My pelvic issues crept in years ago and progressively got worse. Doctors told me they were normal, and I believed them until four years ago, when unexpected waves of pain made me question if I was dying.

I went to urgent care in tears. The physician assumed I had appendicitis and sent me to the emergency room in a wheelchair. It turned out my appendix was fine, but the medical team noticed signs of a disease called endometriosis in an ultrasound. I had never heard of it.

I Googled it when I got home. Endometriosis occurs when tissue similar to the inner lining of the uterus exists in a place where it shouldn't be, often in the pelvic cavity. The misplaced tissue reacts to hormonal changes, which can cause severe pain, infertility and, in the worst cases, life-threatening disruptions to normal bodily functions.



Endometriosis affects 1 in 10 women.

According to the Endometriosis Foundation of America, the condition affects 10% of people born with female reproductive organs. However, it takes most people seven to 10 years to get a diagnosis and treatment from the start of symptoms. At the time, I felt extremely lucky that the doctors in my small Minnesota city had put this on my radar. I assumed I was on my way to feeling better. I was naive.

Three years later, I wasn't any closer to getting pain relief. My husband is in the military, so we moved shortly after that ER visit. A doctor in my new city insisted on ruling out other causes of my symptoms. All tests came back normal, except for irregularities in four consecutive ultrasounds.

There was not much left to rule out when we moved to Astoria, so I assumed I could finally convince doctors it was time for diagnostic surgery. By this point, I was desperate. On

any given day, I'd get a sudden pang of excruciating abdominal pain that would break me into a nauseous, cold sweat and render me unable to walk or think clearly for hours. Some aches never entirely went away, like an oversized hand that wouldn't stop squeezing my abdomen.

Excision surgery is the gold standard of treatment for most endometriosis patients with severe pain that doesn't respond to changes in diet or lifestyle. But when I met with doctors here, it was a medical showdown. A primary care doctor suggested I skip the diagnosis and get therapy to talk out my issues. The OB-GYN I visited discouraged surgery or even an MRI scan for further imaging. When I pressed her reasoning, she didn't know what excision surgery was. When I insisted on a referral to an endometriosis specialist, she wasn't familiar with anyone who did that work, so I was on

my own to find someone.

Facebook saved the day. Thanks to the social media group “Nancy's Nook,” created by a retired Pacific Northwest registered nurse; I discovered that there are eight endometriosis specialists in the Portland area. In comparison, several more populated states only have one, and some have zero.

I met with a specialist, who immediately suggested diagnostic surgery. So, “Did they find anything?” Yes.

I have stage III, deeply infiltrating endometriosis, an aggressive form of the condition. The irregularity that appeared on my ultrasounds was actually tissue that fused my organs together and contorted them out of anatomical place. Luckily, my doctor could excise all of my lesions and adhesions and put me back together in a three-hour surgery. The ache that never left is finally quiet, and I finally have hope for a better quality of life.

I kept my struggle private for a long time, but I hope my story might be read by another woman in Astoria who has endometriosis and may not realize they may have a treatable condition that their doctor doesn't mention.

I urge Astoria doctors who treat female gynecological issues to take endometriosis seriously. Some patients need more than therapy to live with this debilitating condition. Believe women who insist something is wrong with their body. They should get familiar with the wealth of experts who are just a two-hour drive away so they can suggest referrals to experts. Shorten the time it takes for patients to get a diagnosis.

There is no cure for endometriosis yet, but there can be hope for better days. The women of Astoria deserve it.

Nikki Davidson is a former editor of Coast Weekend.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stop

In the U.S., approximately 1,600 youth smoke their first cigarette each day. We all know how detrimental smoking is to our health. Yet here in Seaside, two local candy stores continue to market gum and chocolate in the form of candy cigarettes.

What are they thinking? Do they really make such a profit on them to warrant making cigarettes attractive to children? I have asked both stores to stop selling them, but have been met with resistance.

As a retired public health nurse, mother and grandmother, I respectfully request the stores to stop marketing cigarettes to children.

SALLY GARDNER
Portland

Two questions

I just have two questions.

Question No. 1: Who's been in charge of running the world, like, forever?

Question No. 2: How's the world doin'?

War, pestilence, fire, flood, Facebook

— Isn't it time to pick different kinds of leaders?

(OK, that's three questions.)

DONNA LEE ROLLINS
Astoria

Watch out, Mickey

The recent editorial cartoon, “Disney and politics” (April 2), showing Mickey Mouse getting zapped at an electric outlet, leaves me wondering if readers understand the voltage of politics which Disney has plugged into.

The worldwide entertainment conglomerate has, within weeks, made at least two interesting business decisions that are at opposite ends of the political spectrum.

On the one hand, Disney+ is expanding into Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen — all of which outlaw homosexuality.

On the other hand, however, Mickey and the gang are getting involved in opposing Florida's just passed Parental Rights in Education law, which bans teachers from giving classroom instruction on sexual ori-



LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Astorian. Letters should be fewer than 250 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. You will be contacted to confirm authorship. All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and factual accuracy. Only two letters per writer are allowed each month. Letters written in response

to other letter writers should address the issue at hand and should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil. Send via email to editor@dailyastorian.com, online at bit.ly/astorianletters, in person at 949 Exchange St. in Astoria or mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR., 97103.

entation or gender identity in kindergarten through third grade.

Having dealt untold times with kids aged in single digits as a substitute teacher, I would find it difficult to approach these topics at all with the youngsters.

Disney's position is it's OK to include this in school curriculum to kids who can't tie their own shoes or pack their own lunch. But they also find it kosher to do business in countries that could execute a teacher for even mentioning those terms to the kiddies.

Disney and others in the entertainment industry are rightly getting shocked when they stick their paws into the political outlet.

I'm sure Walt Disney wouldn't approve of what the current ownership is doing with his creation. If he was still alive, he'd probably tell them to entertain people, stay out of politics, and quit acting Goofy.

MATT JANES
Jeffers Garden

Dreaming

Dumbest thing ever (at Heritage Square)! A plaza may look OK in Portland (maybe not now), but until Astoria can keep the blue tarps, garbage and carts out, we are dreaming!

DICK DARBY
Astoria