

"My illness gave me strength to help others"

From CYNTHIA TOUSSAINT

At the age of 21, Cynthia Toussaint had a brilliant career as a ballet dancer when she suffered a torn muscle fibre. This was the trigger for an illness that she has been struggling with for three decades now. Since then Toussaint, now 57, has been suffering from unimaginable pain. What took most of her strength back then was to find the right diagnosis.

It was only 13 years after her injury that Toussaint learned that she suffered from Sudeck's disease, a chronic pain disorder that is probably due to a dysfunction of the central or peripheral nervous system. She is also called the "suicidal  
ness", as some patients experience the enormous pain that affects the whole body,  
just can't stand it. "Sudeck's disease is triggered by trauma – it can be a heart attack, but it can also be a needle stick," she writes in her memoirs, *Battle for Grace*. "In response, the nervous system sends a message to the brain, which is 'Pain!'" And this signal does not stop afterwards, as it normally does, but becomes stronger and stronger. If it is recognized in time and treated correctly, the disease can be stopped. If not – in Toussaint's case for 13 years – the neurons that send the pain signal to the brain share your signal with other neurons, and the disease spreads to the rest of the body," she writes.

Toussaint also often thought of suicide: "I was bedridden for ten years and had excruciating pain." At the time, many doctors thought your pain was psychosomatic.

Later, Toussaint took matters into his own hands. She informed the public about Sudeck's disease and the danger of false diagnoses. In 2002, she founded the non-profit organization For Grace to highlight the medical discrimination of women suffering from pain. "Studies show that women often feel more pain but are helped less than men. We want to represent their interests. We want them to stop feeling alone."

Thanks to integrative medical care, Toussaint finally achieved partial remission, but she is still in a wheelchair. Besides her artistic passions – singing, writing and making music – working at For Grace has given her a lot of  
She says she's given you strength.

"Helping people helps me stay healthy – it gives me a reason to get up in the morning."

Caption:

Toussaint fights for equal treatment in care

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