

MIGRAINE PROFILES

Ligia Mendizabal The Migraineur as Artist

Ligia was born in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala and has lived in the United States since 1994. She has painted her entire life. She holds a degree in graphic design and has mastered a variety of art forms, including oil, watercolor, acrylic and collage. Her watercolors have won recognition and formal awards in multiple exhibits. She lives in Corpus Christi with her physician husband and four children.

The artist in me would be paralyzed by the “migraine monster”

Ligia’s journey

“For as long as I can remember, I’ve had the ability to transfer my inspirations into graphic form. I was lucky; an appreciation of light, color, shadow and perspective came naturally to me.

Those were the years of my life before migraine. Then, as a teenager, I began noticing distortions in the shapes, colors and lights of my oil paintings in the moments preceding a headache attack. The sensitivity to light during a migraine would force me to squint and then lose the details of my work. I would often continue working during an attack of migraine, and the end result would sometimes unintentionally tend towards the abstract.

In my twenties, after my first pregnancy, my migraines took a turn for the worse. I began experiencing more disabling symp-

toms during my aura; the visual distortion and photophobia were joined by nausea, numbness and weakness of my limbs and difficulty articulating words.

I became very sensitive to the chemical scents of my oil paints, and the nausea and smell sensitivity that odor caused me led me to seek out scentless media like watercolor, ink and pencil.

I also noticed that my sense of the intensity of colors changed during periods of migraine. Colors became bolder and more vibrant. Little would I know initially that those same colors would come to dominate my acrylics and watercolors as I passed from my thirties to my forties! At the time, however, I experienced a decline in my productivity. Migraine-free days were full of ideas and potential projects, but the artist in me would be paralyzed by the “migraine monster” during my headache days. Those same ideas would lose coherence and form. Lines and shadows were difficult to discern. Acute medications helped me fulfill my basic commitments as a mother, but even with them I found the “aftershock” of a migraine attack would give me the sensation of what I call “the artist with no hands”: that strange sensation of having the ideas inside your head but being unable to put them onto the paper. I came to see migraine as an agent that diluted my ideas, like boiling water that dissolves a drop of paint in a glass.

Another negative aspect of being a migraineur artist occurs when you find yourself unable to enjoy an exhibition, an art show or a fine art museum. Art is my life, and



migraine was taking over that life. Migraine limited my visual scope as an artist. My eyes become disabled to light and color.

By my early forties my chronic migraine had become severely disabling. I would find myself spending more days in my darkened bedroom than in my studio. I no longer experienced consistent relief with use of medication for acute headaches. My artistic productivity declined and was often reduced to a mere sketch in a notebook. Frustration. Disappointment. Migraine was consuming far too much of my life.

And then I finally began to experience a lessening of my headache frequency and severity that has persisted up to now [knocks on wood]. Whatever was responsible for my improvement, whether it resulted from a change in my hormones or in response to



my prayers, I am simply thankful. After many years of suffering, the artist in me now finds joy in light, shadow and color. There is no longer a monster who denies me the joy of transferring my ideas onto a canvas. And yet...although I have persevered through my migraine, and although my migraine has not defined me as an artist, I cannot deny that I continue to find the echoes of migraine in my work."

For questions regarding Ligia's art or other examples of her work, Ms. Mendizabal may be contacted via ligmendi@yahoo.com

This is the debut of Migraine Profiles, what we hope will become a regular feature that our readers find appealing. The feature is intended to provide migraineurs with the opportunity to express not just the negative effects that migraine have had on their lives, but also the efforts they have made - and the success they've had - in coping with their disorder. If you would like to share the story of your migraine, please send your profile to the magazine's editorial office at edoffice@migraineurmagazine.com



NOT YOUR AVERAGE HEADACHE DOCTOR

About Krymchantowski



Headache Doctor, Helicopter Rescue Pilot

A lean, darkly handsome and highly personable man notable for his good humor and obvious intelligence, it's difficult not to admire and respect Dr. Aouch Krymchantowski. On any given day, Dr. Krymchantowski can be found caring for headache patients in his clinic in Ipanema or piloting a helicopter on a mission to rescue wounded police officers in his native city, Rio de Janeiro.

...why he chose this particular professional path and how he balances his passions for medicine and for action.

Helicopters aside, Dr. Krymchantowski is a highly accomplished neurologist with an international reputation for his expertise in the subspecialty of headache medicine.

During a typically busy day he graciously found time to discuss why he chose this particular professional path and how he balances his passions for medicine and for action.

Why neurology? Why headache?

“When I started my residency training at the Naval Hospital in Rio de Janeiro, I initially intended to become a neurosurgeon. Because it seemed to me that too many surgeries were involving the spine, and because I’d always loved the science of the brain, I switched to a residency in neurology. As I gained experience as a neurologist, I found headache to be a neurologic disorder where one could really help people. Unlike neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer’s or demyelinating diseases like multiple sclerosis, for example, well-informed treatment literally could change the life of a migraine patient. By the end of my first year of neurology training I had begun to focus on headache as my subspecialty area of interest, and that interest has persisted for the past 35 years.”

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Why helicopters?

“I’ve always liked action, and both police work and military life have always appealed to me. When I left the Navy, I decided to join the Military Police (MP) of Rio, the ‘police on the streets’. I went through the selection process and training to become a Lieutenant Physician of the MP, but...I also always loved helicopters. In 1995, immediately after the International Headache Society meeting in Toronto, I traveled to Fort Lauderdale and completed a helicopter pilot training program.

Since 2011 I’ve flown more than 800 hours involving all kinds of missions. Included have been missions devoted to rescuing wounded policemen

At that time, however, the Rio Police did not have an aviation unit. I consequently devoted much of my time with to rescuing policemen wounded in action, and I worked to create a group formally responsible for performing that function. In 2009 I was asked to develop an aerial police service. I accepted, but only on the condition that I be one of the operational pilots. Since 2011 I’ve flown more than 800 hours involving all kinds of missions. Included have been missions devoted to rescuing wounded policemen: 134 officers in 2017 and more than 50 so far this year.” To view videos of Dr. Krymchantowski in action as a helicopter pilot for the Brazilian police, go to:

<https://www.migraineurmagazine.com/krymchantowski-video>



For those of us fortunate enough to be his friend or patient, this dynamic individual has managed to blend his passion for action and adventure with an impressively strong sense of social responsibility. Dr. Krymchantowski is not your average headache subspecialist.

