Patrice’s story on obsessive compulsive disorder

I remember it like it was yesterday...it was 1986 and I was a 26 year old outgoing girl with lots of friends. I was attending a local college where I was enjoying myself to the fullest.

This is where the story changes: I was alone in my downtown apartment watching late night T.V. and out of the blue I started to feel strange, a feeling that I had never felt before, I thought I was dying.
I called a cab and went to St. Paul's Emergency room. When I arrived they asked me if I was coming down off drugs? I replied no!....but I do feel very strange and I feel like I'm dying.
They proceeded to take me into an examination room and look me over. When the doctor was finished he said take this pill and wait in the waiting room for a while then you can go home. So I waited for about a half hour and went back to my apartment where I spent the rest of the night wondering what had just happened to me. After a long sleepless night I got ready and left for work. As I was driving across the bridge the same symptoms as the night before started resurfacing...the uncontrollable fear, the dizziness, the loss of feeling in my limbs...(not so good when your driving over a bridge), the feeling of impending doom...well you get the picture, it was happening again, .what was wrong with me? When I finally got to work I was a mess, my day was shot and I had great difficulty concentrating on anything. That was the beginning of the end.

After a year of suffering quietly I finally told my doctor that I felt an anxious feeling and that I was having trouble doing much of anything besides worrying about what was wrong with me. He gave me Ativan and sent me on my way, no explanation of course. I took these pills and they did work to take the edge off but they did not solve the problem. Every time I had a bad attack as I called it I would be back in the doctors office trying to get any answers I could.
Finally after a couple of years of complaining my doctor sent me to a psychiatrist and they said you have panic attacks. Wow! Ok what does that mean? You've got anxiety, try these pills! I can only tell you that I tried them all...you name the anti-depressant, I tried it. Actually, none of them worked because what I didn't realize was that not only did I have panic attacks and anxiety, I had OCD too which is part of the anxiety family. This I discovered after years of searching for answers.

Here we are years later .....another psychiatrist.. another type of pill. To tell you the truth no one really knew how to help me because I wasn't disclosing all of my symptoms i.e. My OCD consisted of thoughts of hurting my husband when we were sleeping, the fear of knives in my sink, the thoughts of going crazy and doing something insane in public. These thoughts were so disturbing to me that I wouldn't dare tell a soul. I actually didn't want to believe it myself I used to go to the book store and look up mental illnesses to see if I had a serious mental illness. I felt that if I did tell anyone about my unwanted thoughts that they would put me in jail and that everyone that I had ever met or known would know about my secret. After years of therapy and medication I finally met a psychiatrist that said that he thought that the OCD diagnoses was correct but that he really had no way of helping me besides prescribing medications and listening to my problems. He did say that he had heard of a cognitive behavioral therapy study taking place at UBC Anxiety Disorders Unit and that they might be better suited to my particular problem. I had literally nothing to lose so I asked him to recommend me as a patient.....ASAP!

When UBC finally called me I had be suffering with symptoms of anxiety and OCD for about 17years. To be honest it has been extremely

difficult to look back as I write all of this down on paper because, it makes me realize that I have traveled a very hard road to recovery. When I started my program at UBC Anxiety Disorders Unit I was really sick, not by their standards, but by my own. The doctors at UBC are extremely educated in this field and are not surprised by any symptoms you may have. I know because, at the beginning I would only disclose minor OCD thoughts. I still felt that my thoughts were not OCD but thoughts only a crazy person would have. Well after an intensive 12 weeks of therapy I have to say that I now have control over my thoughts and my OCD. My time spent at UBC anxiety disorders unit has really given me my life back and for those of you that are relating to some of these symptoms or even some of you own, I have one thing to tell you, please do not stop looking for help. My situation took a long time to rectify as my symptoms started in 1986 and there really wasn't much help back then. Today there is help and doctors know what anxiety is and where to send you for help. Twenty years ago, people were not educated in this field like they are today, there is help out there and it's yours for the taking. I am so happy to be sitting here 20 years later symptom free. I could not have done it without the wonderful people at UBC Anxiety Disorders Unit and I thank them with all of my heart.

Last but not least - Anxiety only gets worse if left untreated so please don't be afraid and let people help you, you've got your life waiting for you.