Inverted sternum, concave chest, candy dish and ice cream bowl are all phrases I grew up using to describe my chest. Deformity is a word I never grew up using, but it is accurate. I have a deformity and its name is Pectus excavatum. Whenever a doctor sees it for the first time, they ask if I have any symptoms. When I tell them the symptoms they told me there was nothing to worry about.

I have never been able to keep up with my peers in sports and exercise. I have always paid attention to my clothing so that the dent in my chest is not obvious. I have always been prone to respiratory infection. I have always had low blood pressure. I have complained of heart palpitations and 4 times worn a Holter monitor for 24 hours to monitor my heart and been told everything is fine.

Everything is not fine. My symptoms began to worsen in my 40’s. Prior to this, while I couldn’t do as much as I wanted to, I was active in hiking, biking and my favorite, I love to water ski. I worked out to my personal capacity 3 to 5 times a week. That started to become more and more difficult. I thought I had allergies. It started as a light cough, and became constant. I found that my endurance when doing any sort of cardio was getting worse. I went to see an allergist. He had me do a breathing test that triggered a terrible attack of coughing. He immediately told me he suspected I do not have allergies, but asthma. After further testing he confirmed that my problem was asthma. He referred me to a pulmonologist.

The pulmonologist did lung function testing and found my lungs are functioning between 50-60%. After a cardio pulmonary exercise function test, he found I have severe exercise intolerance. A CT scan shows that my heart and lungs are compressed, with my heart shifted all the way to the left and pressing into my lung. It was then that he recommended me for surgery.

I am now waiting for my consultation with a cardiothoracic surgeon. The surgery to correct this deformity is best done between 12-18 years of age. I am 50. I am working with the premier surgeon who specializes in working with adults. Now I am to the point that standing long enough to make dinner makes me tired. My heart races, skips beats, drops too low, and is erratic. This leaves me with chronic fatigue. Were it not for the Coronavirus pandemic, I would have had further testing and my consultation with the surgeon by now. All that was canceled as the corona virus situation worsened.

If you, or someone you love has this condition, I have created this site to offer information and hope. I know I was looking for other people like me. People who understood a lifetime of having symptoms dismissed. I craved hearing about other pectus people’s experiences. Here I will share my experience and knowledge. I offer you that hope is always available.

Now I know that my the best word to describe my pectus excavatum is miracle. My body continues to miraculously allow me to live a full life. The severity of Pectus Excavatum is measured by looking at the narrowest point on the CT scan and dividing width from side to side, by the height sternum to spine. This is called the Haller index. A Haller index of 2.5 is normal, 3.5 is severe, and mine is 7.4. I have little over 1 inch between my sternum and spine. The fact that my body has been able to function for so long is a miracle. Under tremendous stress, my body still works hard to perform at its best. I am learning how to work with that. We can learn together. Welcome to the Pectus Perspective, where hope is always available.