



TWENTY YEARS AT THE NIA PROJECT at Grady Memorial Hospital and Emory School of Medicine!! Where has the time gone, and am I really that old?

Given that it is my twenty-year anniversary at Nia as the Clinical and Education Director, I wanted to do something special to mark this milestone. But I also wanted to honor all our Nia women who I have had the privilege of meeting and working with. It is you, the Nia patients, who are my inspiration to continue to fight against domestic violence, prevent suicide and enhance well-being and continue all the other work the Nia team and I strive to do.

However, it is also the 10-year anniversary of another major but not nearly as positive event that occurred in my life. So, given the unquestioned trust you have placed in me and Nia with some of your deepest secrets, life changing traumas, and stories of survival, I wanted to share a piece of my life with you. I would like to share with you one of my own stories of survival that is both very personal and painful and that has had a significant impact on my own wellbeing and still does to this day.

Ten years ago, I was rushed to the hospital with excruciating chest pain and was subsequently diagnosed with numerous serious septic (MRSA) pulmonary emboli in my lungs. This event almost killed me, but I wanted to live! Finally, after weeks in the hospital and six weeks on a powerful antibiotic pump around the clock I recovered but was left with significant consequences. As some of you may or may not know, I have since suffered from some chronic health problems that continue to constantly plague my life. The worst and scariest – a rare respiratory disorder that causes my airway to close and me to stop breathing with little warning, which could kill me at any time. Subsequently, I spend a lot of time in the hospital, often in the ICU on a ventilator! So, as I'm sure you can all imagine, this is not only really frustrating because it impacts my ability to do my job as well as I'd like to, but also causes anxiety and depression and so seriously impacts my wellbeing.

But as we coach so many of you to build a psychological toolbox and find passions to help you through difficult times, it would be remiss of me to not take my own advice and do the same! So, my passion – music. I like all different kinds of music, but my true saving grace is P!nk!! Why P!nk? Well, although I unfortunately don't know her personally, given we are the same age, I have followed her life and journey closely enough to know that she, like so many of you, is a very strong woman. She is kind, generous, courageous, and humble but also outspoken and doesn't back down. She stands for so many good causes, is a feminist, an equal rights warrior and encourages others to be who they want to be regardless of that others may say or believe. I respect her as a person and strive to further develop many of the qualities she has. But she also reminds me in many ways of each of you – your strength, resilience, determination, potential and that bright light that emanates from each one of you. Many of her song lyrics remind me of you too. Although many of you struggle with suicidal thoughts, a line in one of my favorite songs of hers is:

“If you you're alive it means that you're committed to survive.

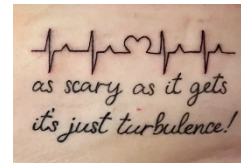
That's enough to drain the life from you sometimes, but I hold on tight.”

This got me thinking about what I could do to commemorate both anniversaries I talked about. Something permanent that wouldn't be forgotten over time. So, I got my very first and only tattoo of a P!nk song lyric on September 9, 2023! It is located in the exact place on the left side of my ribs where those septic emboli tired (but failed) to take me out. But is also located close to my heart – just like the Nia Project. My tattoo says:

*“As scary as it gets its just turbulence.”*



It also has a design over the top of the lyrics of a heartbeat with a heart in the place of one of the beat spikes – for Nia! Unfortunately, the picture of me on a ventilator in the ICU is just 3 days later – that's how turbulent life can be. And trust me, just like being in control matters a lot to each of you, when you are the doctor it is so hard to give up control and be the patient.



I wanted this tattoo to be a reminder to both me and to you all that when things get bad and we feel like it will never end, or we want to give up, that as terrible as it feels it's just a rough patch and it will get better! Well, that's my interpretation, you may interpret it or apply it to your life differently in whatever way feels right for you! And as P!nk goes on to sing “When you say you can't, I'll watch you dance through this turbulence” – Just as I have watched so many of you courageously do the same time and time again!

I'm still here, so thank you to all our Nia patients throughout the years for showing me that I too can dance through the turbulence, and for being my inspiration and the reason why Nia is so close to my heart!

