Episode 00
Introduction-

Before the official podcast starts, I want to introduce myself and tell you my story. Like most people I don’t think my story is very interesting but when I started to reflect over the last 10 years I realized there have been certain events in my life that just happened….you know the type of moments where you weren’t really looking for a something or actively seeking a change but then BAM!...life changing, serendipitous, God appointed things happened.

The best place for me to start is by telling you about Cindy. As an 18 year old starting college I was certain I would be a nurse, flight nurse or nurse practitioner….can you hear the common theme. Spoiler alert: I am not a nurse. In 2010 I had just gotten engaged to my amazing boyfriend, now husband, and needed a job while waiting to be accepted into nursing school. Cue Cindy. (music would be awesome here)

Cindy had been moved to Oklahoma so her aging parents could take care of her after she had a severe and life threatening reaction to penicillin, followed by a stroke, in her late 40s. I was hired by her parents to complete her home care on days she wasn’t at dialysis. Our time together included me making her lunch, taking her outside in her power chair for sunshine breaks, helping her with her home exercise program her home health therapists prescribed to help with her deficits from the stroke. Her main goal was to one day walk again. We worked steadily on her range of motion, leg strength, and bed mobility. All the while waiting for my acceptance letter to nursing school….which did not come. Being devastated by the news, mostly because I didn’t have a back up plan, Cindy made a comment to cheer me up. It was something like this “I know you are sad about not being a nurse but you’re the best therapist I have had and I think this is what you should do instead of nursing.” After talking with her some more and talking to the PTA that came to her house I decided I would apply to the local program---I didn’t get in the first time I applied. Mostly due to grades---PSA take school seriously kids. The second time I completed my application I had retaken any class that wasn’t an A, completed the maximum number of observation hours and submitted a reference letter hand written by sweet Cindy. The day after I mailed my application I went to work at Cindy’s house only to find her alone and unresponsive in her bed. She died about a week after being on life support. I thought about her everyday of my PTA program. She single handedly convinced me to pursue a different career. A career that never crossed my mind before meeting her. Without her coming into my life I would have never discovered the passion I have for helping others achieve physical goals they never thought possible.

Cindy never walked before she died but I can tell you she marked off using a potty chair before leaving this earth---her number 2 goal—no pun intended but so accurate! Five years into this career and I have yet to meet anyone more excited about using a bedside potty chair instead of a bedpan.

So that is the story of why I am a PTA. Next stop, becoming a CLT.

+music

In 2016 my husband and I found ourselves moving and changing jobs from where we had been the previous 3 years. I was starting back at the hospital where I worked previously but not quite full time yet. WE call this PRN, basically if there are hours you get them and if there are not hours you don’t work. One day I heard there was a lunch meeting in the department I had been in before. It was required for me to go but hey I like free food and I wanted to see some of my friends. In the meeting the Outpatient Manager talked about how her lymphedema case load was too much for one person and she needed help. They asked if anyone was
interested to let her know. As I sat there eating my free Jimmy Johns cookie I thought….My mother in law is at risk for lymphedema now that she has been diagnosed with breast cancer…I like unusual diagnoses…That sounds interesting…even if I don’t get to do it a lot I will probably learn something to help my mother in law.

I text Lisa after the meeting and offered to help some days after work if they needed some help. Mind you I was not certified or aware of needing to be certified. Really, I think I was just expecting more PRN work where I could come help when I was needed but work somewhere else when the caseload was down. WRONG!

The next morning my manager found me and said if you are serious about helping with lymphedema in outpatient we need to get your transfer paper work processed, you have to register for a class, and we need to open your current position so we can hire someone else. The rest of the day was a whirlwind, I hadn’t even told my husband I had offered to help the day before. By the end of the day I would be transferred and moving back to the outpatient clinic I had started at in 2013 as a brand new grad.

---That is the story of how going to a meeting for free lunch put me on the path of lymphedema--

Next stop advocacy and education
Once I took the course I knew I was in love. Cheesy? I don’t care. I love helping people newly diagnosed with lymphedema learn about lymphedema by showing them there is still life to live. It didn’t take long for me to join the Texas team for the Lymphedema Treatment Act, visit surrounding support groups, advocate in Washington DC for the LTA, and attempt to create our own support group for the local community. Through joining the Lymphedema Advocacy Group, specifically the Texas team I met a woman who lived in the same town as me who had been desperately searching for a CLT to help her. It had been three years since she was diagnosed with bilateral lower extremity lymphedema. She immediately emailed me when she recognized my work email address as a local hospital. Within two weeks she was in our office for treatment. Meeting her really fueled my fire to tell others about lymphedema and the need to educate other medical professionals.

I don’t just love telling others about lymphedema, I also love learning new techniques and approaches. In April of 2018 I went to Florida for the Advanced Lymphedema Management to learn more about head and neck treatment, kinesio-taping for lymph drainage, wound care, and how to treat advanced stages of lymphedema. I brought so many new techniques back with me for my patients! Then just last month, November 2018, I went to Boston for the Harvard Medical School Lymphatic Symposium. There were people from all over the world there, aside from the food poisoning that kept me away the first full day of the symposium, it was a great experience. Three words: lymphatic system cadaver. I met the first doctor to map the human lymphatic system in a cadaver arm! It was amazing!

So now that you know my educational and professional background let me tell you a few personal things about how I got here:

I am from a small town in West Texas, population less than 1,000 people. I skipped class all the time in high school because I was bored. Not I am too smart bored just I don't want to be here bored. I always wanted to be around people, talking, making them laugh, helping them with pretty much anything. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine I would meet Cindy, have her change my mind about the only career I had ever considered, fall in love with the way physical therapy can change peoples lives , accidentally go to a meeting for free lunch only to leave not knowing my entire career path was about to change. I most definitely never saw my passion for lymphedema patients coming. It is more than a passion. I feel compelled to tell people about lymphedema because it does not discriminate and anyone is at risk.
My dream for this podcast is to create a dialog for the people who need these answers. The scared, confused, hopeless, and discouraged people who are searching the internet for answers because even their doctors aren’t sure what is causing the chronic swelling, cellulitis, pain, or tightness. The people who want to help their mother, father, spouse or friend by understanding the disease they are fighting with everyday. The therapists, doctors, nurses or home health aides who don’t understand the whole body impact of this disease. This podcast is for you, the person listening right now who just needs some answers and encouragement that you are not alone on this journey.

Mother Teresa says “Loneliness and the feeling of being unwanted it the most terrible poverty” This podcast is here for you to find friendship and a community for your journey with Lymphedema.

I hope you enjoyed learning more about me. Email me with your story if you would like to share. Lymphedemapodcast@gmail.com or visit the website lymphedemapodcast.com to submit a topic for another episode.