

Rebecca, diagnosed at age 17

December 22nd is the day the word Lupus was engraved onto me! I was 17 yrs old, a senior in high school and I knew I would be spending Christmas recovering. Not really sure what that meant, ignorance is bliss, Mom bought me a new pair of pajamas and a matching robe I remember they were blue with white clouds. I don't think at age 17 I could even grasp the fact that my life was about to change. My family all kissed me good bye and told me I would count to 10 and then wake up and it would all be over. That was so not the case and unfortunately for me I had to be awake for my kidney biopsy! I guess neither of us were paying attention when the doctor explained the procedure. Lupus was very hard for my family to take in. I guess since I am the baby and youngest of 4 children. We all did not know what to expect or how big this mountain was going to be to climb! Back to the biopsy, I felt everything that poked me and every sample they took from me! They had to hold me down and I remember crying and pleading with god to make it stop! Only for them to tell me that was the first one and they needed to do a couple more! I have tears as I write this and that day Lupus tested my faith. I will still say to this day, that biopsy was one of the hardest things I have ever had to go through. I have lived with Lupus for 10 years now and I celebrate as I tell you my story!

Lupus will never define me! In the ten years that I have lived with my diagnosis I decided my career, found my true self and married my soulmate! Lupus has not always been rainbows and butterflies but I am pretty special and Lupus helped me become the person I am today!

I attended college and was forced grow up. I juggled school, work, medication, doctor appointments and chemotherapy. Fridays were the days Lupus patients got Cytoxan chemo treatments. There were always 4 or 5 of us sitting there for hours on end getting our dosages. I was always the youngest of them all. I didn't need to party in college, chemo was all the fun I needed for the pleasure of puking just like my college mates! I do not remember talking to the other patients, I kept to myself mostly. I would see their hair falling out as they sat there like me and I swore I was going to have it different. Attitude is everything I believe.

Lupus has tested my patience! After my diagnosis I became the "sick one" of the family! She may not notice but my mom will still say things like "well take a jacket coz your sick". I find myself doing everything to prove that theory wrong, because I am not sick! Being tired does not mean one is sick. I think the first several years I was ashamed of Lupus. I use ashamed for a lack of a better word but really I did not talk about my Lupus much. When people did learn about my diagnosis they were shocked which made me feel good because that meant I did not look sick.

I have my days where I wake up in the morning and my body is achy. I wake up tired and can nap at the drop of a hat. After the chemo was all over with, I was doing very well with just the meds that they actually stopped everything

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all together. I proceeded with out meds for a couple years and then started having problems walking. I was in denial and blamed the pain on all the wrong shoes. In the end it all came right back to Lupus and here I am again on medication. If thats the worst its going to get then I will take it! There were times I thought my feet were going to snap and break off. It was hard I admit, Lupus at that time tested my self-worth.

Just a couple years ago, my husband and I discussed children and our future. Since I need the meds to walk, I would have to be off them during the pregnancy. We do not know how the Lupus will affect my pregnancy during and afterwards. Is it fair for my husband to have most of the load in child caring, if I am so tired all the time? Well he loves me and is more than willing to take on the task and if it comes to it, we will adopt. It is something we most definitely should plan. Because of the chemo we do not know if I can even have children. Of course when the one thing they tell you that you cannot have, then thats the thing you want most in this world!

I am in a great place! I have found peace with my Lupus diagnosis. My husband introduced me to biking and it was the perfect activity to get me out and about with the least impact on my feet. With time and patience, I started accumulating more miles on my bike Bella and with this came more confidence and self-worth! In fact on September 12, 2009, I will be in Boulder, Colorado doing a Triathlon! It is a 750 meter swim, 23 mile bike and 4 mile run! It is the Tri for Your Cause. My registration fees and money raised will be donated to a Lupus organization.

I admit if I did not have Lupus I do not know if I would have ever signed up for this triathlon. This is all ME out there and I will celebrate every stroke, every pedal and every step of this race! I may never have this chance again. I am a Triathlete! I am a strong intelligent woman, daughter, wife, sister, aunt, best friend and a Certified Sign Language Interpreter who just happens to have Lupus! When I was diagnosed I wish there were more success stories for me to have been introduced to. Knowledge is power and if I can get my story out there maybe someone will be inspired!