

My Story

I was diagnosed with Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis (JRA) in 1994 at the age of 17. The disease came out of nowhere. I was a very active teenager involved in cross-country, cheerleading, and track. I was at the top in all of the sports that I competed in and Varsity on the cheerleading squad.

The summer before my senior year, I began training for the upcoming cross-country season and I began to have a couple of joints hurt, then my knees and knuckles swelled. Soon, the arthritis had begun taking over all of my joints. We were unsure what was happening at first and I was tested for allergies and other diseases. All came back negative. The one positive was the possibility of 5th disease that they believed I had been affected with in the summer when all of this began. Still, the diagnosis became JRA at the age of 17.

I lost 20lbs and 75% of my muscle strength within the first 6 months of that year. I slept a lot from the pain as well as depression, and my parents had to help me with minor tasks such as blow drying my hair or getting out of bed. We prayed for a healing answer and were introduced to a wonderful doctor at Riley Children's Hospital in December that put me on Methotrexate, a cancer drug. This drug suppressed my immune system and stopped my body from attacking itself. I thrived on this drug and the disease seemed to "go away". By the end of my Senior Year, I was starting to run again.

I went to college in Tennessee and danced on the Vanderbilt dance team. I also ran the first Country Music Marathon and worked in a restaurant as a server. I seemed to have a normal life again. I just had to take medicine once a week and would have some flares when stress was high in my life. My junior year of college, I was in remission. A case of Mono that hit my liver caused my arthritis to completely stop. I was off of all medications. There was hope that I would be in remission forever. Yet, the stress of my senior year proved that theory wrong, but the dose I had to start on again was so small it was practically non-existent. I continued to stay active running and cycling.

In 2005, 11 years later, I became engaged. I knew that I needed to get onto a different medication before our wedding because of birth defects if we were to begin a family. July of 2006, I started a self-injecting drug called Humira. The day that I began to self-inject was an eye-opening event. I realized that this was something that I would be doing for the rest of my life.

When first diagnosed with JRA, they told me that many children outgrow the disease by the time they are 18 years old. I got it so late in life that there was uncertainty as to what course this disease would take. I had always believed that there was a hope for this. The day I began Humira, I realized that I would not be "outgrowing" the arthritis. I would only inject twice a month, but for the first couple of months, I cried every time that I gave myself the shot. October 7th, 2007, my husband and I were married. The night before our wedding was the last time that I gave myself the shot.

On returning from our honeymoon, I found out that we were having a honeymoon baby. I was instructed to quit my medication. Arthritis goes into remission during pregnancy and my arthritis did just that. During this time, I began to really research the effects of drugs and sacrificed comfort during colds and aches and pains to keep from ingesting any medications that could affect my unborn child. I even researched and accomplished a drug-free labor and delivery. I had a beautiful son who was wide-eyed and alert at birth. Life was bliss. But I was naïve to believe that the arthritis would stay away.

Six weeks after the birth of my son, the symptoms began to return. My hands, my feet, my knees, suddenly it was all so familiar again. I had wanted to nurse my son for the first year of his life, knowing the health benefits this would provide. At 2 months of age, I was just hoping to make it to the three months mark before I had to begin medication again. Every morning, I was picking a floor to be on in our two-story house. The idea of walking unsteadily up and down stairs with my son was something I didn't want to attempt for fear of falling or dropping him. I had many joints that were completely stiff and would not bend.

My husband had to lift my son into my lap and position him for night feedings and put him back to bed when finished because I could not lift him on my own. I waited for him to take his first nap so that I could sit in the shower for thirty to forty-five minutes trying to warm up my joints. As the three-month goal approached I had a friend talk to me about a vegan diet and the benefits for arthritis. My husband had also heard Dr. Bob Marshall on his radio show talk about arthritis as an infection in the joints. I had done so much research about drugs during my pregnancy and I knew that the Humira I would begin again for my arthritis had some nasty side effects such as MS, cancers, nerve damage and diseases. I couldn't imagine not trying something more natural first before risking my life to a drug and possibly leaving my son without a mother. We contacted Dr. Bob Marshall's office for a practitioner in our area and were referred to Sherri Lund at Bridge to Better Health.

On our first consultation, we found that, for the sake of a better phrase, my body was pretty messed up. The QRA Analysis was a very strange experience, but was so very accurate. Unfortunately, I was still going to have to stop nursing my son to hit the toxins in my body with the anti-infectives. So, I began the maintenance supplements until I was able to stop. I had hoped that I could go this route and still obtain my goal of nursing him for a year, but I realized that he needed his mommy to be healthy more. I also realized that my son was only going to continue to grow and get bigger and heavier. If I didn't do something now, I would not be able to care for him. So, I weaned him slowly over a month and managed to make it to four months of nursing him and saved enough in the meantime to give him one bottle a day in his fifth month. The last day that I nursed him was very emotional. I knew this was the best for both of us and I did all that I could do to provide for him.

While I was weaning him, my husband and I began to take on the vegan diet. I continued to research this philosophy finding that animal proteins can definitely cause arthritis sufferers problems. I also wanted to make sure that we were not causing any sort of

deficiency. I was surprised to find how much healthier we both were eating this way. We had a lot more energy too. Within the first month of just cutting out the meat and taking the maintenance supplements, my fingers began to loosen back up. I was able to bend my previously stiff thumb again! I couldn't believe it. November of 2007 I began the full course of supplements for my arthritis. I continued the diet knowing that this would only accelerate the process. No toxins going in means less to expel in the long run.

We are now approaching September of 2008. I have been doing this for 10 months. The first few months it seemed that everything in my body was constantly off and there felt like there was no end to this. I honestly wondered if all of this was really going to work. Amazingly, 10 months later, I am down to very little above maintenance supplements. I have a few aches in my feet that I think are related to bone spurs and am working on eliminating those. I also have a couple of joints in my hands that still make themselves known in the mornings. But I am happy to say that I am lifting my 19lb, 14month old son in the air. This was something that I couldn't do when my son was only 9 lbs. I am also crawling on the floor with him and taking daily walks in the neighborhood.

The road to where I am now was not an easy one. It was not a quick fix. I definitely could have taken the shot of Humira and probably felt better in a week, but I would have been taking a risk. My rheumatologist didn't believe that I would see positive results. She was not optimistic and guaranteed I would be back on medication within three months of my returned symptoms. I have yet to take medication.

My journey is also not complete. My goal is to be completely pain free. I have made it this far and I am not going to stop. My QRA sessions with Sherri have helped to erase the years of abuse that I have put in my body. Family and friends have seen results in me that have them asking questions. This time, my husband and I prayed for a miracle of healing. I believe that God pointed us to simplicity. Putting the right things in our bodies, things that He provided from the beginning of time. That is my healing, my miracle of life. This life change, that included diet, which helped to put only the right things in my body, and supplemental nutrition which took care of the infections and also provided for deficiencies, both have given me a second chance to do right to my body and I am going to take it.

Kimberly R., Houston, TX
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