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What I Have Learned From Living with CF...

I could never imagine my life without Cystic Fibrosis. It has become a rock in my life, something that ruins my garden, but yet has made me a stronger gardener. I have to plant around it. And when I look back on the past twenty years, I am amazed and delighted by the beautiful flowers that have managed to grow despite this rock. Cystic Fibrosis is, in my opinion, such a tough disease. And it is not because of the hours and hours of treatments everyday, or the dozens of pills you pick up at the pharmacy monthly, and it is not because of the constant supervised diet or the tube feeding during the night, but it is because of the way I look. Healthy. Like nothing in my life impacts me. Like we should live to be hundred, and like we should be able to do everything our peers are able to do. In my life, this has been the hardest thing to deal with... to accept. I want to be able to do everything and anything whenever I want to do it. I do not want to have to worry about whether I will get sick, if I had eaten yet, or if I can stop coughing cause I have yet to do my treatments. And my friends often forget this as well. They look at me smile and think that means I am healthy with lungs that work like theirs'. I look healthy but I have never felt healthy. And that always breaks my heart. I do not even know what it feels like to feel healthy... normal. A good day for me is when I do not notice that I am simply walking.

Living with Cystic Fibrosis has been something not only I have lived with but everyone I surround myself with has lived with as well. It is a disease that affects the whole family. The worries I inflict on my mother and father, the worries I inflict on my friends, the worries I inflict on my brother and sister. When you live with Cystic Fibrosis everyday is an unknown. No day is like the last, and no future can be planned out to an exact. And when you live with Cystic Fibrosis everyday is a struggle. You have to wake up and work hard to live everyday. And if you slack off, you will never escape the consequences. You certainly do live on a day-by-day basis, and for many children who suffer from this disease I believe often loose to ability to dream of a future, or even begin to think that there will be a future for them. As a child, I grew up thinking my life would be cut short. I grew up thinking no flowers would ever be planted in my garden. Twenty-one was an age I never thought I would reach. I did not know my own roots could grow this deep. And somehow I think the morning I woke up and turned twenty-one was almost as scary as when the thought that 20 would be my last year of life lingered in my mind. Now, twenty-one, I am starting to realize that, yes, a future for me will be possible. I will enter the "real world." I will leave the arms of my parents to a house of my own. I will get a degree and I will pay taxes. I will do it all. It is an overwhelming feeling, almost too strong to feel. It is exciting, as well as scary. I am allowed to dream now. Wow.

Cystic Fibrosis has made me made me angry. Because of Cystic Fibrosis I was put "under the knife" at the tender age of nine, and there have been five surgeries since then. Because of Cystic Fibrosis I have made the hospital my second home. Because of Cystic Fibrosis, "the butterfly" needle strikes terror into my body, too many needles and too many times my body was too weak to comply. Cystic Fibrosis has made me feel sad. Because of Cystic Fibrosis, I have wondered how long my life will be. Because of Cystic Fibrosis I have cried because I do not want to go to the hospital *another* time. Because of Cystic Fibrosis, I have missed so much school I wonder how I even graduated high school. Cystic Fibrosis has made me feel betrayed by God. Because of Cystic Fibrosis I wonder if I will be able to have children of my own. Because of Cystic Fibrosis I have to hook up to a machine at night just to stay alive. Because of Cystic Fibrosis, I have never known what is to laugh, laugh hard without having a coughing fit. And in the end, Cystic Fibrosis has made me feel strong. It has given me courage and wisdom beyond my years. It has given me the ability to see the gift that life truly is. And in the end, Because of Cystic Fibrosis, I am thankful. Without it, I would not have grown to be the person I am. And the person I have grown to become is someone that never says no. She understands rocks can grow in gardens; she plants around them. I smile at the person I see in the mirror everyday. God has given me a challenge, but he has blessed me with so much more. And that is evident because I stand alive and loved today. And in the end, maybe that is the only thing that makes you really healthy.