

## Rachel's Story

10 Year Reflection-I can still reach back in my memory and remember the day I was diagnosed. I remember my doctor coming to my hospital bed in the out-procedure room as I was drowsy, and half-asleep from anesthesia after the colonoscopy and endoscopy. I remember still being drowsy in the back seat of the car as my mom explained to me what the doctors had diagnosed me with- Crohn's Disease. However, for the most part, I remember the sense of relief. It had taken a multitude of doctors eleven months to diagnose me and it was freeing to finally know what I had. But it was a false sense of relief. What I hadn't realized that day is that I was gifted with a disease that was resilient and stubborn. There was no cure for it and it would stick with me for the rest of my life- until a cure is found.

That was all ten years ago and so much has happened in ten years. I've learned and grown along with the Crohn's community. The biggest change has been the knowledge and technology. It took 240 treatments over a six year span to finally find the regiment that works for me today. However, that's not as common anymore. Doctors and researchers have been able to find better treatment options to make the road to clinical remission faster. Testing has also improved to diagnose patients faster. When I look at the gastroenterology community ten years ago versus now, there is mass improvement. Due to all of these improvements, doctors have been able to put patients in remission faster than before and it all starts in the lab. When putting money towards research initiatives, researchers have the ability to create medications and find diets and procedures to improve the life of Crohn's patients and bring us closer to a cure. I personally thank doctors and researchers for helping me find a regiment to help me put my Crohn's in remission and to live my life.

Although there have been major improvements and awareness, being a Crohn's patient is far from easy or simple- it's a constant upward battle. Even though I've been in remission these past few years, there are still good days and bad days. I've still had to miss school days, work, and the bathroom is still a battlefield. But the important part is to remind yourself not to wallow in the ugly parts of the disease. Instead, we have to realize that it's a new lifestyle. Living with Crohn's is a lifestyle. It's not something you can occasionally have or choose when it's convenient to recognize it. It's always there. And it may not be comfortable to talk about, but without talking about it, no change or awareness will occur. For the first few years of my Crohn's lifestyle, I was embarrassed to talk about it. I didn't want people to know about the struggle and hardships of having Crohn's. Then I realized that talking about it is important because for every one person you tell, they go and tell 3 more people. And that means four more people know about Crohn's Disease and the conversation will just keep spreading.

As I go into my tenth year of this Crohn's lifestyle, I think about the doctor who told me when I was eight years old that I would have only eight to ten more years to live. I think about all the people who told me what I couldn't do because of my Crohn's. However, the best part about having a stubborn, resilient disease is that it teaches you to fight and be stubborn and resilient. Because there have been plenty of times I wanted to put my boxing gloves away. You just have to tell yourself that for every one "can't" you are told or obstacle you are presented- show them a million reasons why you can and will live your life.

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