

Honored Hero Simone Leo



Hi everyone. My name is Simone and I have been living with Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) for 9 years. Since I was a baby, dairy products didn't agree with me. Growing up, I also stayed away from salads, which caused cramping and discomfort too. But when I was 19 years old I experienced a multitude of symptoms ranging from frequent bathroom visits, bloody stool, severe cramping, weight loss and fatigue, which became very scary to my family and I. After an upper GI series, blood tests and a colonoscopy I was diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis. I was treated with all different types of medications with the highest doses and I was hospitalized too, in order to reduce the inflammation. I even developed steroid induced osteopenia from being on prednisone for 4 years. It wasn't until I started to develop "Crohn's-like" symptoms 6 years after my diagnosis that caused me severe rectal pain that led me no other option but to have surgery. After having a subtotal colectomy ileostomy where my large intestine was removed and I was given an ostomy bag, my diagnosis changed to Crohn's Disease. Although this news was hard to accept, for the first time in my whole life I was pain free and eating whatever I wanted! I gained my strength, energy and weight back and headed for Israel with my sister on Birthright after the doctors told me I wouldn't be able to go just 2 months before.

After 6 months I received a reversal surgery where they connected my ileum to my rectum and I became bag free. It took a little over a year for my body to adjust without a large intestine and with the help from 2 medications that I am currently taking. I haven't experienced any unpleasant symptoms since then and have been in remission for the first time since the year 2002.

Upon receiving a Team Challenge email in August 2010, and feeling the best I have ever felt, I decided to take the challenge and participate in the 16 week journey of completing my first half marathon in Las Vegas, benefitting the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America. What a better way to direct my positive energy and join in the fight against Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis!

It definitely hasn't been an easy ride but I am extremely grateful to have such a strong supportive network filled with caring family members, friends, coworkers and excellent doctors. Being educated about the disease, listening to your body and advocating for yourself to your doctors, practicing stress reducing techniques such as yoga and maintaining a positive attitude all have been extremely helpful in the challenges I faced living with IBD. Although my family and I faced many hardships and difficult decisions of how to treat the disease, I never let it take control of my life. I received my undergraduate and graduate degree in Social Work, held many different job titles, volunteered for the community, lived in Spain for 3 months and traveled all over, got married, bought a house and completed a half marathon! I continue to enjoy the pleasures of life and I know that if my symptoms rear its ugly head again, I have the confidence, knowledge and right attitude to help me manage it in order to feel better again.