

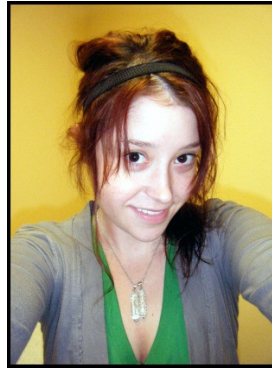
Team Challenge

CROHN'S & COLITIS

Honored Hero

Ashley

Age 24



My name is Ashley Pierce. Not only do I suffer from Crohn's Disease, but I am a huge advocate for CCFA and return as the Honoree for Team Challenge 2011. Most 24 year old adults can't say they have been fighting for life over a decades' time. I was diagnosed with a disease I had never even heard of. I had no idea what having Crohn's disease really meant. There was no way to prepare myself for all the pain, surgeries, and hospitalizations, nearly dying, and having weight issues that is now my life. I hope through awareness some other person who is diagnosed doesn't get blindsided by the mystery that is Crohn's disease. I was in the dark for years trying to understand my disease and hopefully it will shed light for others in that position. Aside from all of that, how do you mentally process being a child one day and the next, forever thrown into a very adult world of life and death? Even before I was diagnosed in my early teen years, a child still, I had to learn to either fight or die.

At times something as pleasurable as eating can be turned into one of the most miserable tasks. Because of pain my body was emaciated due to the lack of nutrition I could take in. My lowest weight to date was 68 pounds. Keeping weight on isn't my only issue. When I am on steroids I pack on the pounds so fast. My heaviest to date is 150 pounds. Between the Rock 'n' Roll 2010 marathon and the Rock 'n' Roll 2011 marathon, I have gone from constantly vomiting and unable to enjoy simple pleasures such as your favorite foods, to having a good run with no issues. About 6 months after my surgery to correct the vomiting (which it did beautifully), I started to decline again and started vomiting again. My heart was and still is broken from the realization of the constant change in my quality of life.

I have been flown by air ambulance to Stanford and the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. I've also spent time at the Mayo Clinic and hospital in Arizona. The top doctors in the world couldn't even come up with an answer to help me. As I've been told, I'm a "complex creature." I have had countless surgeries and hospitalizations since 2005. Since January 2005 I have been hospitalized 42 times. Each visit lasting a minimum of 2 weeks.

My family and I are huge advocates for this disease. The first couple Take Steps walks I was in the hospital, but was amazed by all those who walked in my name. The last 3 years I have raised approximately \$20,000 with the Take Steps Fundraiser. This past walk I received \$10,200. Though I have missed out a lot in my Take Steps involvement believe me on December 4th I will be there, seeing a movement taking place right in front of me. I am very involved in the Crohn's and colitis community and look forward to being a part of our Team Challenge season. Thank you all for your support and letting me be part of this team.