

I've never been a fan of the doctor. Growing up, I found myself in the hospital several times a year because I was sick. Even when I wasn't sick, I was getting analyzed and having tests run on me. This is because I have a lung disease called Cystic Fibrosis or CF for short. CF affects around 100,000 people worldwide, and even though it affects everyone differently, it is a disease that used to mean a very shortened life span if you had it.

Even though I got extremely lucky with my medication being perfectly suited to my genetic code, I still had to grow up different from all the other kids. Growing up with CF I had to wake up early, do my treatments, take my medicine, do my inhaler and then begin the day, and that was when I was healthy. I had to do another 45-minute session of treatments every night before bed. My condition never prevented me from doing anything, but it has put many unusual obstacles in my way. When the class would go to recess, and everyone would run and play I sat there out of breath trying to keep up. When my friends wanted me to sleep over, I would have to bring my medicine and my breathing machines. I never told anyone I had CF, and to this day I still don't talk about this with anyone I'm not particularly close with. This is because I want to be normal, and I don't want to get any special treatment from anyone else.

Having CF from a young age put a chip on my shoulder. I always wanted to play sports and achieve my goals, just so I can prove to myself that I can still be successful, even with such a huge setback. Going into my senior year of high school, I am the captain of my lacrosse team, leading the team in both goals and assists. I don't share this to brag or show off but to show how a lung disease doesn't define my potential for greatness. What I once thought was my biggest curse turned out to be a blessing, teaching me the value of working harder than anyone else to get where I want to go.

Just recently I switched to a new medication which makes it possible to no longer need daily treatments (I only have to do them when I am sick or not feeling well) and this is pushing me closer to being just a normal person. Along with the medicine that gets to the core of the genetic mutation that is faulty in my body, the other reason I no longer have to do treatments is because of how active I am running, whether in the gym, running outside or playing lacrosse.

I know firsthand that being different is hard. But it can also change you for the better if you let it. Every time I am on a long run, and I am completely out of breath, I remember doing my treatments, being plugged into a machine with a vest pounding on my lungs to make me close to what other kids can be. I remember constant trips to the doctor's office or being in a hospital room. When I have a lump

in my throat from running so hard, I visualize getting the back of my throat swabbed (what the doctors always check to see what virus or bacteria I have) and I push on. I used that hurt to turn those bad physical feelings into positive mental ones. I use all those thoughts and feelings to tell my mind to make my body keep going.

Many people say that you can't teach work ethic, but I disagree. CF taught me that I need to work 10 times harder than anyone else to get where I want to go. Now that I'm almost as close as you can get to being cured of CF, I still carry that work ethic into every challenge put in front of me.

I do not yet know for certain what I want to be or what job I want to have when I am older; but what I am 100% certain of, is that I know I can push myself to get where I want to go. I will never let fear or uncertainty determine my future, and I will always choose to see the benefits in any challenge I may face.