



MEET SUZY

My name is Suzy and I am 39 years old. I am a wife to my amazing husband, Ryan, and a stay at home mommy of two beautiful girls, Lucille and Alice. I was diagnosed in August of 2008. I remember exactly where I was because time seemed to stand still. My life changed forever on that day. Although I was devastated, in complete and utter shock, and scared of what was to come, I also found great solace in finally having a diagnosis for what my body had been enduring for years. A huge sigh of relief, yet tears for the unknown.

I am very passionate about running. It not only keeps my symptoms at bay, but keeps me emotionally and physically healthy. I have run four marathons, including the Team Challenge Wisconsin marathon and several half marathons. When I raised money for the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation, and trained for the marathon I was actively flaring. I spent the morning of the race in the bathroom with quite a bit of blood. My family strongly tried encouraging me not to run. Quitting isn't an option for me. Even though I didn't get the desired time (did I mention I'm extremely competitive? LOL, there's no "C" in Suzy), I poured my heart and soul into that race, and managed to get just under 4:20. I hope to be an endurance coach for Team Challenge, or Take Steps someday. I would love to help in any capacity I can. I used to work in event management that involved directing a 5k run, so not only do I have that leadership experience, but I also have the runner and participant perspective.

To have this disease means that some days are harder than others. Some days, I might use the

bathroom upwards of 20 times. Some days, I have to stick to chicken and rice. Some days, are really, really challenging. Then, there are really awesome days! This disease has taught me to appreciate every single moment of my life. You never know what will be thrown your way. Make the most of the time you have. This disease doesn't dictate my life, rather, it's a part of me.

I have taken 9 pills a day of mesalamine since I was diagnosed. Last summer, I was put on a steroid, and hospitalized with an IV blast of steroids when the oral didn't work.

Today I am feeling strong, healthy, grateful...and tired. I have a one year old and a three year old, so who wouldn't be exhausted?!

I am incredibly fortunate to have supportive friends and family. Not everyone understands this disease, and in fact, I've lost relationships due to some lack of understanding, or empathy. My family has been by my side through everything. My parents and sister have been my lifeline and saving grace through some very tough times. One person who has seen me at my worst is my husband, Ryan. He knew exactly what he was

continued on next page

getting into when he married me, and still jumped in feet first. I remind myself constantly how lucky I am to have him. He has seen me buckled over in pain, he has taken care of me in my darkest hour, and been the best father to our two little ones when our world was completely shaken. He has also had way more poop conversations than he probably ever wanted or thought he would have.

I am passionate about finding cures because I want to live a long life to watch my children grow up. I have learned to live, and not feel well at the same time because I have to remain strong for my kids. That is my normal, but I would love to know how it feels to go through life feeling 100%, or at least 90%.

The Foundation has absolutely had an impact on my journey. When I first diagnosed, I didn't know anything about IBD, Crohn's specifically. The foundation harbors a wealth of knowledge, support, human interest stories, and so much more. It's very frightening in the beginning, but the foundation lessened that fear and anxiety by giving me the necessary tools to make informed decisions about my disease and health.

I also believe in the strong connection between the mind, body, and gut, so I run....I run A LOT. I not only run because I love how it makes me feel, but it also lessens my symptoms. If my symptoms are creeping up, it usually means I need to get back out there. I also have to eat a pretty clean diet. This is where it gets tricky though. The typical "healthy" diet isn't always good for someone with IBD. Diet and exercise aren't always enough to keep away a flare, but it sure does help. This disease is incredibly unpredictable, but it does give me peace of mind to know I'm doing everything in my power to stay healthy.

I wish others understood that IBD is not just a bathroom disease as is so often depicted on TV. It can also affect other organs in your body. In addition to medical issues, this disease can also affect one emotionally and mentally. I've had conversations with people who tend to think IBD is psychosocial. Sorry to say, but this drives me bananas. Believe me, I didn't do this to myself.



I do think there is a genetic component because have some distant relatives who also suffer from Crohn's disease. I was also sick a lot as a kid and took multiple antibiotics which I feel may have disrupted my microbiome.

If I met someone newly diagnosed I would advise them to educate themselves. Knowledge is power, and knowing more about your disease will help you make better informed decisions that will directly impact your health. Attend meetings, find a good support network, and surround yourself with loved ones. You will have dark days ahead, but they're so much easier to get through when you have someone to lean on. Find a good doctor. It took me awhile to find a doctor I was compatible with, but waiting for a good one is worth it. I love my current gastro doc! He's pretty awesome. Communication is key, so you need to find someone you're comfortable with. I wasn't always comfortable about talking about bowel movements, blood, consistency of stool, etc, but now it's just my normal. I mean in my opinion you have to have some poo humor with this disease.

People who have IBD are the strongest people I know, and we will find a cure. I hope to be an ambassador for the Foundation someday because I feel I have a powerful message to deliver. I am currently working on launching my blog, *ChronieMommy*. I will be sharing stories on this site, offering support, and serving as a source of inspiration. I am a strong woman, wife, mother and I have Crohn's disease. It will not beat me. Together, we will beat IBD.



SUZY

SWEET. UNDERSTANDING. ZANY. YOUTHFUL.