

2009 Jingle Bell Run Honoree

Ali Decker

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Ali Decker, a seemingly normal, optimistic 18-year-old, has recently graduated from Dublin Jerome High School. However, the road to college has been a difficult journey for Ali.

When she was nine years old, she was diagnosed with Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis. At the time of the diagnosis the arthritis was in her jaws, knuckles, hips, knees and ankles. Ali was suddenly no longer able to do the typical activities most nine-year-old children were freely able to do. Simple things such as unlocking a door and opening a can of pop were a complicated challenge for her. It was heartbreaking for her family to watch their energetic child not have the energy, strength or mobility that she had a month earlier.

However, thanks to Nationwide Children's Rheumatology, the drug Enbrel and the Arthritis Foundation, Ali was eventually able to use most of her joints without being in pain. When she was younger, Ali attended the Arthritis Foundation Kids Camp where she met and interacted with other kids who had arthritis. Now, Ali is returning the favor and is volunteering as a Kids Camp counselor where she will mentor other kids at camp who live with the same condition she has faced.

Even with this dreadful diagnosis Ali has never let her arthritis interfere with school, sports, work or her social life. Being very stubborn and strong-willed and with a great sense of humor, she has always lived her life to the complete fullest. Through the pain she has played high school soccer, club soccer, softball and also has participated in swim team. Ali has never used her arthritis as an excuse to get out of work. She has maintained good grades and has worked for Justice, a clothing store for young girls, for the last several years.

Ali is also a wonderful big sister to her younger sisters Andrea and Paige. She is empathetic to those around her and with her quick wit, is always able to make those around her laugh. She loves life and it shows in everything she does. Now that she has graduated in June 2009 she is studying to become an elementary teacher at the University of Toledo.