



Julia Lewis
2014 Jingle Bell Run/Walk
Youth Honoree
Springfield, IL

It was last year when Julia's piano teacher noticed that a joint in one finger was bent strangely, but it wasn't pronounced enough to think much of it. Then last winter Julia woke up with foot pain. Her parents thought it was just growing pains, but in February she started to limp upon waking up. Initially, her pediatrician thought it was an orthopedic problem, but weeks later Julia's knee began to swell. At prompt care, the doctor noticed another swollen joint and ran a series of blood tests, telling her parents he suspected juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. Julia's pediatrician referred the family to a rheumatologist who started her on a pain reliever. It would be another six weeks of pain and swollen joints before a diagnosis of polyarticular juvenile idiopathic arthritis would be confirmed. Her parents are grateful that it was found relatively quickly, as diagnosis of arthritis in children can be a very long process. This past August, Julia was diagnosed with Celiac Disease, which is an autoimmune disease related to gluten. It is not uncommon for people with one autoimmune disease to develop another, and her family still isn't sure which one came first.

In the early stages, Julia could not run or walk without getting tired. It was hard for her to do anything that involved her legs, like climbing stairs, which made it very difficult for her to get around. Julia said, "Sometimes I sat out at gym class, but now, I am doing much better." The main challenge she faces these days is from the diagnosis of Celiac Disease. "Eating gluten and lactose-free is hard!" said Julia's mom. She went on to say, "Learning to administer an injection to my daughter was a real challenge neither of us liked. Keeping up with eight different medical offices and appointments, remembering medicines, and being thankful—none of it is easy, but we are learning how to do it better every day."

Julia and her family have received amazing support from a number of people. Her mom said, "I'm most encouraged with Julia's attitude. She has stayed positive and trusting that God is in control of her and the challenges she faces." Julia works hard to stay active and enjoys reading, going to church, playing Minecraft on the tablet, science projects, piano, journaling, and collecting big-eyed stuffed animals. This summer Julia started beginning gymnastics, and she really loves to swim! Julia's church youth activities, her seven-year-old brother, four-year-old sister, and five-month old puppy Gandalf, a white mini-schnauzer help keep her active. She loves choir and science class, and hopes one day to be a zookeeper, veterinarian, and a mom.

When asked about her hopes for the future Julia replied, "I hope I go into remission or I can find a way to control my juvenile arthritis without weekly shots, and that scientists make a pill that would allow me to have gluten again! Someday I'd love to go to South Africa (where my dad just went on a ministry trip)."

Julia is quite the ambassador for the Arthritis Foundation. Over the last several months, she has learned a great deal about juvenile arthritis, and feels more comfortable talking about the disease. On being involved with the Jingle Bell Run/Walk Julia said, "It is a chance to do something fun for arthritis and those chances don't come very often."

At just 10 years old, Julia is brave and courageous beyond her years, and we are thrilled to recognize her as the 2014 Jingle Bell Run/Walk youth honoree.

About the Arthritis Foundation

The Arthritis Foundation (www.arthritis.org) is committed to raising awareness and reducing the unacceptable impact of arthritis, which strikes one in every five adults and 300,000 children, and is the nation's leading cause of disability. To conquer this painful, debilitating disease, we support education, research, advocacy and other vital programs and services.