



**Allison Watson**  
**2013 Jingle Bell Run/Walk Youth Honoree**  
**Alton, Illinois**

Hello! We are the Watson family and we are very proud of our daughter, Allison, for being chosen as the Alton 2013 Jingle Bell Run/Walk Youth Honoree.

In the years before Allison's diagnosis the only symptoms were what we thought were normal aches and pains associated with growing. At age 10, we noticed her fingers beginning to curl inwards. It was during her 6<sup>th</sup> grade physical our family physician agreed something was not right. He referred her to Cardinal Glennon Saint Louis University Care. Just one look and a few questions later Dr. Moore and Dr. Feller, our Rheumatology team, were pretty confident of her diagnosis. Blood work and x-rays confirmed at age 11 Allison had Polyarthritis (RF negative), a subtype of juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA.)

A new chapter in the Watson family began with her diagnosis. It was Allison's aunt from Cincinnati who sent us the link to the Heartland Region Arthritis Foundation and a book, **Raising a Child with Arthritis**. Shortly thereafter we found a 5K run dedicated to arthritis. The whole family raised funds and mom ran. This was a perfect match, running and raising funds for a cure. Allison, her dad and mom belong to a wonderful group called the Road Warriors. Our RW family is made up of individuals who believe fitness and health are important. Road Warriors run, walk, swim, bike, you name it; we have a member that does it. Most importantly we inspire and motivate others to maintain or increase their physical fitness. All are welcome to join!

The last 10 months since her diagnosis have been full of life lessons. Instead of visiting the doctors for routine immunizations and checkups, we have a new schedule. Every 2-3 months we visit Rheumatology at SLU, Ophthalmology at Washington University, Quest Lab for blood work and physical therapy 3 times a week to round it out. Allison's appointments have now slowed to every 3-4 months and therapy is done at home. She has been fitted with splints for her hands to wear while sleeping to prevent further damage. We are also working with her to strengthen her hands and arms in hopes of removing one of her medications. Enbrel shots are now a part of her weekly routine and seem to be showing positive results. A recent find, the Buzzy Bee, is helping take the sting out of shots.

It may sound as though life is sometimes rough for the Watson Family, especially Allison. That is not so, Alli is a typical pre-teen who loves school (receiving high honors these last two years) reading, friends, Girl Scouts, and church. She also enjoys running with the Road Warriors and Girls on Track. Allison recently learned how to ride her bike, an amazing step for her. Our goal is to keep her as active as possible so this disease won't sneak up on us again.

The thought of Alli living the rest of her life with arthritis stinks, but we know it could be worse. Allison's wonderful team of doctors and the Arthritis Foundation keep our hopes high that someday there will be a cure. What we do today, tomorrow and everyday does make a difference.

Together we can raise awareness for this disease, and we will find a cure not only for adults, but kids too. Please join Allison's family on Saturday December 7<sup>th</sup> at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Godfrey, Illinois for the Jingle Bell Run/Walk. As Allison's parents we are so proud of her for being chosen as this year's Youth Honoree. We hope you will help Allison and other families raise awareness of juvenile arthritis.

The Arthritis Foundation is thrilled to recognize Allison Watson as the 2013 Jingle Bell Run/Walk Youth Honoree, and we appreciate the support of the Watson family.

### **About the Arthritis Foundation**

The Arthritis Foundation ([www.arthritis.org](http://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.