



Brooke Wilkerson
2014 Walk to Cure Arthritis
Youth Honoree
Indianapolis, IN

Arthritis struck Brooke like a bolt of lightning. One minute she was fine. The next, she struggled to get out of bed, brush her teeth and get dressed.

“She started walking around like a 90-year-old lady,” Brooke’s mom Tracy recalls. “She couldn’t walk down the stairs. Eventually her legs got so weak she couldn’t stand up.”

In September 2012, doctors at Riley Hospital for Children diagnosed Brooke with polyarticular juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA). She had arthritis in over 30 joints – including her knees, hands, wrists, shoulders and feet.

“We were devastated, to say the least,” Tracy recounts. “It’s like we were drowning or in a bad dream – completely overwhelmed. Just a couple months before this our little girl was perfectly healthy. Then, it’s like in a single moment, everything was forever changed.”

Brooke now manages her arthritis with 10 daily medications and supplements, including weekly injections of methotrexate, a chemotherapy drug. She follows a strict diet of mostly organic and natural foods and does therapeutic exercises daily. But she found her best medicine at school.

“We were fortunate that Brooke had a little girl in her class who also had juvenile arthritis,” Tracy says. “I think she was okay with having arthritis because she knew she wasn’t the only one. She had a friend who could relate to everything she was experiencing. So that was a huge encouragement to Brooke.”

Brooke is now nine years old and a third grader. She loves to draw, paint and play with her baby dolls. She wants to be a mommy when she grows up. Brooke’s advice to other kids with JIA, “You just have to be brave. I’m able to be brave because I know God is with me.”

Brooke’s strength and courage make us proud to honor her as our 2014 Walk to Cure Arthritis 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.