

Rachel Johnson
How Psoriasis Affects My Life

As a very young child, I was quite the extrovert. I was adventurous, playful, and totally silly. I was quite talkative, easily sharing my "wisdom" with everyone and anyone who would listen. I saw the world as my playground, and I was ready to conquer it! But soon something happened that would change my life forever: I was diagnosed with Psoriasis.

Third grade was a year of staring out of windows. I dreaded riding the bus home. I dreaded being in public and having to show my face. Lacking inner strength and confidence, I preferred to turn away from my struggles and hide my insecurities. My pain was only multiplied when I was publicly teased. I remember those days vividly. I would sit aloof in seat nine, desperately hoping for a day without confrontation. Yet everyday the fifth grader assigned to sit next to me would harass me. "Lizard Face" was his favorite name for me. Not knowing what to do, I would simply turn away and shed silent tears. This lack of confidence translated into all aspects of my life. Even when my Sunday school class did a fashion show, I had to be forced to participate. I was embarrassed. I felt as if I couldn't be as pretty as any of the other girls.

Years went by, and after countless creams, ointments, steroids, and treatments, my Psoriasis was at its worst. I had strep throat over five times in only three months, which caused my face, neck, and chest to turn bright red. Fortunately, I gained maturity with age. Because my Psoriasis would not relent, I had to rethink my perspective. Over time, I learned that regardless of my exterior, I was the same. I learned that character is what truly counts. A sense of empowerment gripped me when I realized that nothing, not Psoriasis, not bullies, not even fear could stop me from reaching all my goals.

I am proud to say that I have overcome my insecurities and doubts to not only become a confident young woman, but also to be an example for my peers who suffer with self-image issues. I no longer allow my Psoriasis to dictate my life. Instead, I find strength and courage in my condition. I gained the respect of my classmates by respecting myself, and now I am senior class president! However, my proudest moment came my senior year of high school, when I shattered every single insecurity I held on to. I participated in a beauty pageant. Although I did not win the crown, I hoped that through me, others would come to see beauty as something more than appearance. I hoped to defy stereotypes.

As my senior year comes to a close, I reflect a lot about who I am and where I am going. Much about the future is unknown, but I do know this for certain: My Psoriasis has made me a stronger person who knows not only determination but compassion. As I journey to college and beyond, I will take with me the courage, determination, and boldness that Psoriasis has given me and use it to make the world a better place.

How I have learned to cope with eczema and atopic dermatitis.

I could remember many times in my life when I was stricken by some form of eczema or atopic dermatitis. In Pre-Kindergarten I was known as "scaly boy" and later on, I grew into "itchy boy" or "itchy-scratchy boy." It was very hurtful to be known by all these crude names.

My parents were exceptionally hard on themselves trying to help me cope with this embarrassing disease. My mother would wash my bedclothes daily with a special detergent but that did not help at all. My father took off all the carpeting in the house and installed hardwood floors. The madness did not stop there. My parents proceeded to discard all the curtains and blinds in the entire house, people taught we were eccentric living in a house with no blinds.

When I was in middle school, I was called "raccoon boy" because I would have very dark circles under my eyes from many sleepless nights from constant itching. My help really came from taking the shots weekly and then biweekly from Dr. Gontzes. I was able to sleep better from the relief I got from Zyrtec. I got little or no help from the topical ointments.

I had missed a lot of school during periods of non-stop skin flare-ups and this has really caused me to get bad grades. My parents were really surprised when I got selected for a prestigious high school internship in Healthcare at North Shore LIJ. Early this year I got nominated by Congress as one of the New York State's most impressive youth leaders. I became a member in the Future Business Leaders Club and joined the Christian Club and became very active in church. I am also part of the High School Heroes.

I will be pursuing a four-year college degree and I intend to continue to make my life success story despite my battle with eczema and atopic dermatitis. I am living proof that I have a skin disease but it does not really have me. If I can do it, any kid can overcome this devastating disease and become a success too.