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Personal Statement

Up until the fall of 2009, my Crohn's disease had mostly consisted of pestering pain and failed attempts at medications that would keep my condition "under control." Some days were much worse than others, but since I could usually make it through the really rough ones knowing a good day was bound to turn up soon, I simply didn't think my Crohn's was that serious. Even though I had undergone the gamut of digestive health testing with two separate doctors in two separate hospitals with the same diagnosis, I was still prone to deny that Crohn's really had much bearing over my life. I had grown accustomed to a distended stomach, sharp, breathless pain beneath my ribs, and nausea.

That fall, Crohn's became a force to be reckoned with. It started with a painful lump. Within a few weeks the dime-sized lump increased in size and pain until I could no longer walk. I had to quit my job and spend my days on the couch, calling and then visiting every type of doctor in the Treasure Valley. Each doctor I went to was at a complete loss as to what was going on in my body. I was prescribed upwards of fifteen medications by doctors who simply tried a shot-gun approach in hopes of perhaps finding something to at least alleviate my pain.

Weeks went by in that condition. None of the medications made any difference for the swelling or the pain. I was confined to bed, losing days at a time in a fitful sleep trying to avoid the pain. No one had any answers as to what it was or what to do about it. Crohn's had shown me who was boss; I forfeited my sense of control when I realized my daily activities were 100% inhibited.

Finally the now ping pong ball-sized lump ruptured and I went to the hospital. The doctor pumped me full of morphine and drained what he identified as an abscess. A CT scan at last revealed what was going on in my body: Crohn's had damaged my colon to the extent that the lining was perforated and stomach acids were escaping into my body cavity and wreaking havoc as it tunneled through my tissues seeking an exit. The ER doctor referred me to a specialized surgeon and I was in my first surgery five days later.

In that first surgery, Dr. Williams discovered three separate tunnels created by the acids. It was Friday, November 13th. I had been bedridden for over a month. I saw my surgeon almost weekly and made significant progress in my recovery. As November drew to a close, I was still on heavy antibiotics and had to force myself to "exercise" by walking up the stairs at least once a day. I would rest on the couch for an hour before I felt confident enough in my leg muscles' ability to hold me up again. But as December dawned, I knew I had to get better much quickly; school started January 6th and what I wanted more than anything was to be able to go back to school and normalcy.

I had my second surgery in December, ten days before Christmas. Dr. Williams found two more tunnels. This time my recovery went much more smoothly; I knew what to expect and I had a goal. I willed my body to heal in time for school. Even though I had to stop often to rest, I even ventured outside my house for exercise, accompanying my mom on trips to Costco. Less than a month after my second surgery, and after three months of mostly being confined to bed, I was back in school.

This experience taught me many valuable lessons, about life and about myself. I was finally forced to recognize that I cannot control my body. That knowledge is priceless now, over a year later, as I have finally begun to understand how to work with Crohn's instead of against it. I also discovered my level of tolerance in the face of pain and seemingly endless obstacles. I developed a much stronger sense of apathy and understanding as I've been able to identify with

others in pain, emotional or physical. The biggest self-discovery, though, was realizing that when I set a goal for myself, I am fully committed. School was my priority, and I worked hard to be able to attend and succeed if it were any way possible. I am much more calm, confident, and capable after this experience because I was given the unique opportunity to define my own possibilities.