



# Maryn White

AN INSPIRATIONAL YOUNG LADY

COURAGEOUS | ADVOCATE | CEDAR CREEK ELEMENTARY

ARTICLE BRIAN SPANO

PHOTOGRAPHY ERIN MANGIAMELI

**A**T THE AGE OF 11, MARYN WHITE IS ALREADY GROWN UP. WHEN SHE was 10, she faced a health scare that most adults could never fathom during their lifetime. But what made this so different for Maryn was how she faced it—with courage, bravery and maturity.

Her story begins like most young girls her age—involved in sports, going to school, enjoying time with friends—but things changed when she began experiencing abdominal pain during a soccer match in early 2011. A visit to the doctor yielded a round of medication, but no real diagnosis. The pains persisted. Finally, a trip to Children’s Mercy Hospital was in the offing.

Doctors performed several tests over what Maryn and her family thought would be a couple of days in the hospital. However, it turned out to be a bit longer than that.

“Almost a month,” says Maryn. “We went through many tests, and they finally figured out what it was. I had ulcerative colitis. The medications I was taking weren’t working, so the only other option was to have a certain surgery.”

In fact, she had to undergo three surgeries.

“She now functions normally,” says her mother Marla. “The entire surgical process is complete. She has been given the clearance to do anything and eat anything that she can tolerate. This has been a major step in her recovery.”

As one might imagine, Maryn did miss a fair amount of school during her surgeries and recovery, and her classmates were curious about her absence. She was out of school from January through May, during her fourth grade year.

Marla gave her the choice to either stay home and be home-schooled or go back to school. Because Maryn loves school so much, as soon as she was physically able to return, she went back in between surgeries. You see, Maryn is a straight-A student at Cedar Creek Elementary, and she didn’t want to miss a thing.

Early during her fifth grade year, she did what many might consider the unthinkable. Maryn took the spotlight in front of her class to tell them about her illness.

"One day it hit me," says Maryn of her decision to inform her classmates. "Maybe I should just go ahead and see what happens. I told my class about my recent illness. A lot of kids thought it was something different. It was kind of life-changing. The kids were shocked."

Marla adds, "The kids were aware she had missed a lot of school. They knew she had surgery, and they knew it had something to do with her stomach, but they didn't know the details. Due to the nature of this disease, not many people know the details or even discuss these matters. Many kids that age probably couldn't handle the details. She did some soul-searching and asked her teacher if she could discuss it with the class."

"Her teacher called me after she spoke and said Maryn had started out a little nervous, but was sitting upright and confident by the time she was finished telling the story. It was as if a burden was lifted from her shoulders. It was a pivotal time for her."

Maryn took another step of sorts when she participated in the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America Take Steps Walk this past summer to help bring awareness to these illnesses. Her team, Maryn's Magnificent Marchers, set a goal to raise \$500, but in the end, they raised \$4,099. Maryn was the number one individual contributor in the Kansas City area.

Bringing awareness has become a top priority now for Maryn, who has aspirations of becoming a doctor when she gets older. She wants to be a cardiologist or orthodontist but definitely not a gas-

troenterologist.

"She's always been outgoing, and through this experience, the doctors recognized that very quickly," says Marla. "She's been able to help some other kids who have been going through the same situation just as there were people who helped us as we were learning about this."

"There was a young man we know who was diagnosed with Crohn's, but he had to have a very similar surgery to Maryn and she went to visit him at the hospital. She spent time detailing her experience and informing him of how best to deal with his situation. He told his parents and us that she was the inspiration he needed to get through this difficult period. That was another real breakthrough and the first time I had heard her talk about all this to someone other than her immediate family."

Now, school, tennis, dance, and friends keep Maryn busy in addition to her work as an ambassador for Crohn's and Colitis. She was recently selected as the 2013 Hero for the Crohn's and Colitis Kansas City Take Steps Walk to be held next June. She will make speeches, appear in literature, and continue to help in fundraising. She is driven to succeed in whatever she pursues. Someday, who knows, she might be the one who finds a cure. ●

To learn more about the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America or the Take Steps Walk, visit [CCFA.org](http://CCFA.org).



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