

by Kristi Hopkins

Make Me Over

CHOOSING TO THRIVE!

I'll never forget the feelings that welled up inside of me the day in August, 2007, when I exposed my 38 week pregnant belly to my new OBGYN. As she examined the bumps that covered my abdomen, a look of shock and pity took over her face as she asked me if I knew what they were. She answered before I could. "This looks like Neurofibromatosis", she said, adding "Well there's nothing we can do about it now."

Anger. Fear. Shame. For the first time I was definitively diagnosed with 'NF'. My anger stemmed from wondering what exactly my doctor thought we could have done about it earlier. Terminate the pregnancy? Not a chance. My fear came with knowing two of my first five children DID have signs and symptoms of NF, and my newest addition could potentially inherit it as well. My shame? I suddenly realized I had been in denial about the seriousness of my condition, and that denial was having a significant effect on me and my family.

As I drove home, I vowed to stop hiding from Neurofibromatosis. Of course, not hiding from it didn't automatically translate into Thriving with NF. My only experiences in dealing with NF came from watching my parents frustration in dealing with my brother's diagnosis and frequent treatments, which ranged from chemotherapy to the the insertion of a shunt to offset NF-related hydrocephalus.

My first blog about NF and its effects on my family was extremely negative. Writing it just added to my frustration. Only after taking my 6 year old daughter Rachel for her first MRI, looking for potential



Before:
Hiding the
confidence
within.

NEUROFIBROMATOSIS:

is a disorder of the nervous system. It causes non-cancerous tumors to form anywhere in the body; inside and out. Other tell-tale signs of 'NF' are cafe' au laits spots (birthmarks), axillary freckling (freckling under the arms, breasts, and around the neck), Lisch nodules (dark pigment in the iris of the eyes), scoliosis (curvature of the spine), deformations of the bones, brain tumors and learning disabilities.

tumors, that my attitude would shift. When she woke up from the anesthesia, she quickly smiled at me, sweetly asking if she could have a purple popsicle. No complaints, no crying, just a smile and a request.

Few things inspire an attitude shift faster than the perspective of a child. Instead of simply surviving with NF, I had to start Thriving with NF. To learn everything I could, educate the world about NF and its side effects, all while encouraging others with NF to stand and be counted, to Thrive with Neurofibromatosis..

I have met hundreds of people around the world with NF. I have connected with NIH, a Maryland research hospital, participating in studies designed to understand, and someday cure or prevent NF.

I also landed in the capable hands of the ladies at Monique's Salon, Never before had I let my bumps be exposed beyond my bathroom mirror. The girls helped me move past my fear as they massaged my back, painted my nails, and put me at ease as they went to work on my makeover. I have to admit, when I heard the words "spa treatment" and "make-over", I cringed. I knew this meant other people's hands touching my body. I knew it meant uncovering more than just the fear of someone seeing my bumps. It meant I had to step up and show other people how I THRIVE with my disorder. Walking into Monique's felt wonderful! The warm and inviting atmosphere hugged me and accepted me from my painted toes, warmed massaged back, all the way to my cut/color and styled hair! Each time I explained my disorder to the women who were working on me, I grew more and more comfortable.

Their loving and experienced hands helped me overcome my biggest fear. This helped to bring out a confidence I didn't know existed.

Thank you Monique! and Staff for helping to show myself and others, that you don't need to be afraid what you don't understand! You just need to embrace it and learn! I will never forget my amazing make-over and a much needed spa experience.



"Ladies remember, no matter the obstacles you face, don't simply choose to survive - choose to THRIVE!"

Monique's Salon

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