

Emily's Story

Diagnosed with cystic fibrosis at age nine, Emily was determined to continue her normal routine as much as possible, including being an avid swimmer and member of the Birmingham Swim League.

After reading a book about a young girl who raised money for her local hospital by riding her bike, Emily decided she wanted to do something similar to help raise money to support treatment and research as well as raise awareness for cystic fibrosis. Spending four to five days each week at the pool, she felt she could translate her love for swimming into a program to do just that.

In 2003, a mere six weeks after her diagnosis, Emily swam 65 laps in her first *Laps for CF*[®] event raising \$60,000, 20 times more than her original goal of \$3,000. The next year, she swam again and raised over \$90,000. In 2005, Emily's *Laps for CF* gained great momentum when it partnered with the Auburn Swim Team of Auburn University and, together, they raised over \$220,000.

The following year, Emily's *Laps for CF* event was held again at Auburn University and also at The University of Alabama. If teaming up with the swim teams at each university weren't enough, she also got campus fraternities and sororities involved helping to raise \$275,000 from both campus events in 2006.

Swimming isn't the only part Emily plays in *Laps for CF* events. She's become an outstanding public speaker addressing large groups, rallying them to her cause. A whiz at coming up with fundraising ideas, she's not shy about organizing friends and family into committees to work on *Laps for CF* projects. She also takes the time to send handwritten notes to solicit support and thank volunteers and contributors.

As a result of the event's growth, the *Laps for CF Foundation* was created to provide organizational support for Emily's *Laps for CF* event and bring more awareness to and make the fight for improved treatment and a cure more efficient and powerful. The Foundation has three employees and a board of directors, including Emily and her father, helping the organization reach its goal of making "CF" stand for Cure Found. In addition to the swim events, *Laps for CF* now hosts other fundraising events including concerts, golf tournaments, an event at Talladega Superspeedway, and more. Volunteer work and donations of time, locations, goods, etc. make the fundraisers possible and increase the amount of money to be donated fighting cystic fibrosis. Funds raised by *Laps for CF* support various CF causes including CF Care Centers at hospitals, research through the CF Foundation, and family assistance.

In 2008, *Laps for CF* has partnered with BioGuard to host *Splash for CF*[™], a nationwide summer swim program encouraging everyone young and old to jump in the pool to raise money in the fight against cystic fibrosis.

"I want to do swim events for as long as people will help us. Even though CF doesn't affect that many people, the people who are affected, it's a major part of our lives," says Emily. But, merely finding a cure won't change Emily's fundraising plans. "If there was a cure for CF, that'd be really great," she said, "But that doesn't mean we'd stop the fundraising even then because you've got to pay for treatments and equipment."

Finding a cure won't slow Emily down and neither will CF. Her daily routine includes 30 to 60 minutes of treatment, involving a vigorous clapping on the back and chest to loosen mucus that could trap bacteria and cause infection, along with a steady dose of pills, including pancreatic enzyme supplements to aid in the digestion of food. Emily considers the medication the worst part of her day. However, doctors believe that her swimming has helped strengthen her lungs, a fortunate bonus from her fundraising efforts.

Since the forming of the *Laps for CF Foundation*, Emily has been featured on NBC's Today Show, the Crystal Cathedral and numerous local television newscasts. She has also been featured in numerous state and national publications including Sports Illustrated, Sports Illustrated for Kids, and American Girl Magazine. For more information, please visit www.lapsforcf.org.

What is Cystic Fibrosis?

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is a chronic genetic disease where a defective gene and its protein product cause the body to produce thick, sticky mucus. This mucus clogs the lungs, leading to life-threatening lung infections, and obstructs the pancreas; preventing natural enzymes from helping the body absorb and break down food.

Approximately 30,000 children and adults suffer from CF in the U.S., and it is known as the #1 genetic killer of children. Before 1990, very few children lived to attend elementary school. Now, the median life expectancy is 37. In less than 20 years, advances in research and treatment have extended the life expectancy of CF patients more than 30 years! Research and care improvement are truly making a difference.