

## **I am Brave: Children Living with Arthritis**

*Introduction by: Corrie Billedeau; Story by: Devin, 13 years old*

***I am Brave: Children Living with Arthritis*** is a book developed by The Arthritis Society to give hope and inspiration to children living with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis [JIA], commonly referred to as Juvenile Arthritis [JA]. The book is also intended to raise awareness about this painful disorder so Canadians develop a better understanding of the fact that arthritis is not just an old person's disease.

The Arthritis Society asked children from across Canada to draw pictures about their lives and their experiences with arthritis. A variety of topics were covered in their drawings including the emotional impact of the disease, day-to-day experiences and what it is like when they are unwell.

The Arthritis Society, in conjunction with an advisory committee comprised of JA patients, representatives from the pediatric rheumatology community, as well as an art therapist selected the drawings included in the book.

### **Devin's Story**

Imagine crawling to the breakfast table because you're too stiff to walk or crying because you are in pain after playing two innings of a baseball game. I would like to tell you about a disease I have had since I was 2 ½ years old.

Arthritis is swelling and pain in any body part. One in 1000 children under age 16 has arthritis. More girls have arthritis than boys. More children suffer from arthritis than cystic fibrosis and diabetes. There is no cure but medication and therapy can reduce the swelling and pain. It is important to start medication and therapy as soon as you know you have arthritis before your joints get too damaged. Doctors don't know what causes arthritis. They do know it doesn't run in the family and it's not contagious.

Since I was first told that I had arthritis, the joints that have been affected are both my knees, wrists, ankles and some fingers. I have taken a lot of medication to help reduce the swelling in these joints. Although medications can help my arthritis, some can also cause problems like stomach pain, bone pain, slow growth, puffy face, fever, weakness, headaches, kidney problems and liver problems.

Every morning and night I do stretching exercises to help my joints stay strong and to keep them moving. Twice a week, I see a physiotherapist who does stretching exercises with me in a warm pool. The warm water helps my joints move easier and feel better. Once a week, I take swimming lessons to help my joints. I also have seen an occupational therapist who made splints for my knees and wrists. I had to wear them at night to keep my joints in a good stretched-out position.

From 1994 to 2001, I lived with a lot of pain and stiffness. Some mornings the stiffness lasted one to two hours. I was too sore to finish a game of baseball or curling, which I like to play. Also my ankles would hurt when I stood or walked for a short time, like on field trips and playing with my friends. Since I started a new treatment in July 2001, most of the pain and stiffness has disappeared. Now I can finish baseball and curling games, walk for a long time on field trips, play with my friends without resting and get out of bed without stiffness. I know this drug can stop working at any time, but right now I will enjoy being very close to pain-free.

**For information about the book "I am Brave" call 1.800.321.1433 or [www.arthritis.ca](http://www.arthritis.ca).**