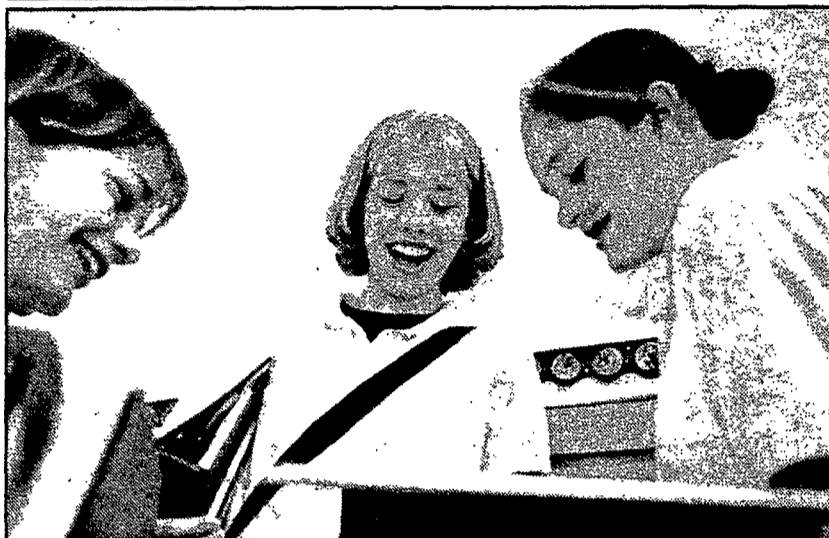


Coping with cystic fibrosis

STORY BY MIKE LATONA • PHOTOS BY ANDREA DIXON



Abby Dwyer (center) and Erika Matheis (left) laugh as their friend Mary Carpenter tries to make up a poem about termites before biology class on Sept. 14 at Our Lady of Mercy High School.

On most weekdays, Abby Dwyer gets up before 6 a.m. and watches her favorite television reruns. Only a true TV junkie would do that, right?

Well, given a choice, Abby would rather be getting her beauty sleep like most other teenagers. She has to wear headphones just to hear the TV over the thumping of the machine that keeps her company. The device, connected by a tube to a jacket Abby wears, produces a shaking motion that dislodges built-up mucus in Abby's lungs.

In addition to this twice-daily procedure, Abby is hooked up to an intravenous machine each night. As she sleeps, a stomach tube feeds her the calories necessary for maintaining her weight.

Then there are the nearly 50 pills Abby must take each day to keep her body from failing on her.

"If I don't take one, I have trouble breathing. If I don't take another, I have a stomachache," she remarked. At times, she added, "I can get completely fed up with it."

This is the required regimen for Abby to cope with cystic fibrosis, a chronic disease she has battled for 11 years.

Until recently, few people knew that Abby, 14, had a life-threatening illness. She prefers talking about her recreational activities, especially basketball. Last year

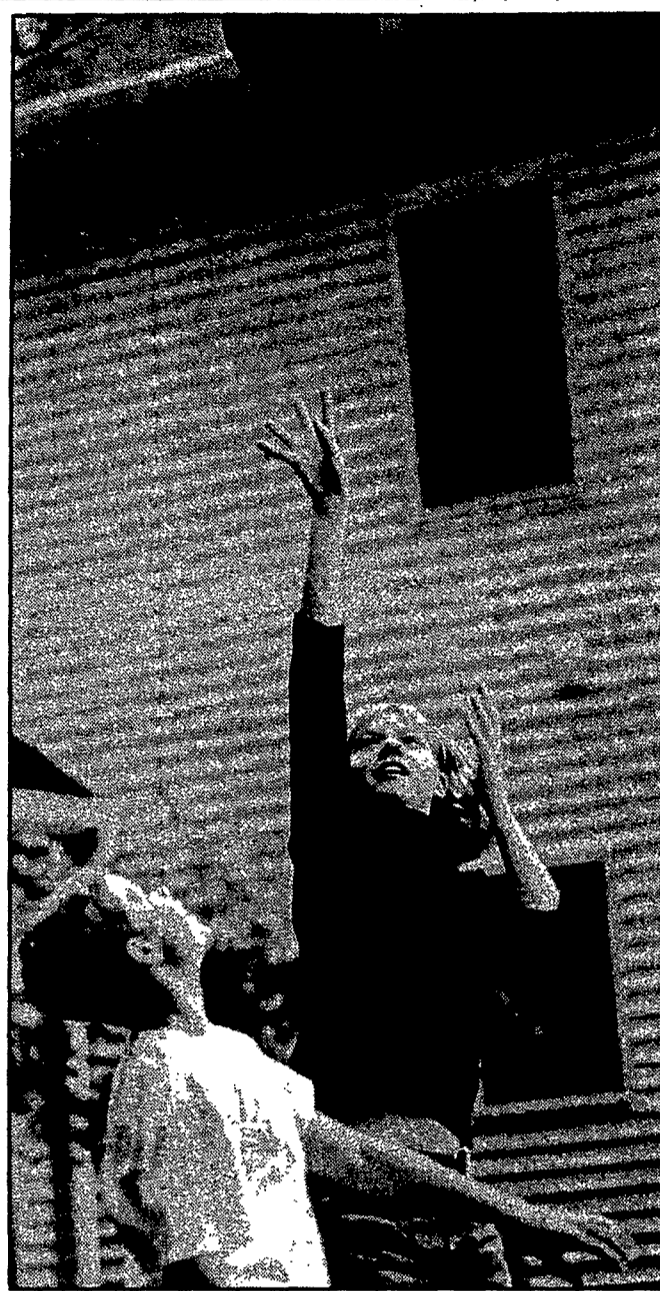
Abby compiled more than 400 points and 500 rebounds in a youth league in her hometown of Perinton. Standing 5 feet, 9 inches — and still growing — she's definitely playing the right sport.

"I just love the game, I love to play. There's a lot of action and it's a real fast pace," she said.

Abby is a freshman at Our Lady of Mercy High School. She plans to try out for junior varsity basketball this fall, and run track in the spring. In addition to athletics, Abby was president of both her seventh- and eighth-grade classes at Mercy and her academic average is above 95.

Only within the last year has Abby's greatest challenge become more public. In April she received special recognition for her courageousness at Rochester radio station WHAM's Sports Women of the Year Awards Luncheon. She was nominated by Children's Hospital at Strong, where she has received treatment for her cystic fibrosis over the past 11 years. Since then, she has appeared in radio and TV advertisements on behalf of the hospital.

"She kind of surprised us. She rarely talked to even her best friends about her situation over the years," remarked her fa-



Abby, 14, shoots a basket over the head of her brother, Sean, 10, at their home in Perinton on Sept. 14.

ther, Kevin Dwyer.

Abby said she initially balked at becoming the center of attention. "It was such a private part of my life, and it's not easy to explain," she said. "But I realize I'm helping a lot of people by doing it."

Cystic fibrosis affects approximately 30,000 children and adults in the United States. It attacks the body's mucus glands and disrupts the respiratory and digestive systems. Death from CF is generally caused by a wearing down of the lungs.

CF is a genetic, or inherited, illness. Abby's father lost two brothers to CF at an early age, one dying at 7 years old and the other at 6 months. Abby's only sibling, 10-year-old brother Sean, does not have CF; nor does her father or mother, Laurie.

Following the discovery of Abby's disease at age 2, she has endured numerous hospital visits. "We certainly know a lot of doctors," Kevin Dwyer said.

Three summers ago Abby had a rough stretch, to the point that she couldn't even walk up a stairway much less shoot a basketball. But through careful daily maintenance, she has stabilized to the point she can once again play her beloved sports.

Kevin Dwyer noted that the mucus-loosening machine cost \$17,000, and prescription-drug expenses for Abby total \$45,000 per year. Fortunately, he said, most of these costs are covered by health insurance.

In addition to her medical rituals, Abby battles CF with a strong determination that doesn't allow for self-pity.

"This is what I was given, and I have to deal with it. I don't think I would have been given this if God didn't think I could handle it," said Abby, whose family attends St. Louis Church in Pittsford.

At this point there is no known cure for cystic fibrosis, and the normal life expectancy for CF patients is about 30 years. However, Kevin Dwyer noted that life spans are lengthening thanks to medical advances, with CF patients now living into their 40s. "We have optimism that they're going to cure it," he said.

Abby, also, is upbeat about her future. "I might want to be a doctor or a lawyer," she said. "I have a lot of different interests."

"I definitely have a positive attitude. I think I've always felt I could do anything I wanted as long as I stayed healthy. CF hasn't really stopped me."



Westside Podiatry Group is pleased to introduce Beth Renee Freeling, D.P.M.

Dr. Beth Freeling is the daughter of Dr. Ronald Freeling and will practice podiatric medicine and surgery with her father and the other members of the Westside Podiatry Group, Dr. Daniel Caiola and Dr. Domenick Calise.

Dr. Freeling received her Doctor of Podiatric Medicine degree from the Pennsylvania College of Podiatric Medicine at Temple University, and completed her residency at St. Barnabas Hospital in Livingston, NJ.

Dr. Beth's special areas of interest are in the treatment of the diabetic foot, including wound care, and the surgical and medical treatment of the deformed foot. She also has specialized in the management of acute and chronic foot pain.



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