

My name is Brooke Bogdan and I am 25 years old. I am a survivor of severe, fulminate ulcerative colitis and the founder/editor-in-chief of Companion Magazine for IBD. The story of my disease is one that may be heard often. I suffered immensely and was left with no option but to have my colon removed in order to save my life.

The memory of the day I learned I had to have my colon removed is a dark one. It is filled with recollections of pain, confusion and a sense of being lost and alone. Thoughts of negativity swirled in my head as I tried to imagine what my life was going to be like for the next 11 months of surgeries and ostomy wearing.

“What other 24 year old girl has to wear an ostomy? This is a disaster. How will I ever get through this? This is so embarrassing. “

Instead of thinking about how my ostomy was going to give my life back – I was focused on all of the wrong things. I was blind to the fact that I hadn't gotten out of bed in 3 months and that my life had revolved around pain and a bathroom for close to 2 years.

When the surgery was done and my ostomy was attached to my stomach, I searched the internet trying to find something, someone to relate too. I went through many blogs and stories and found myself more scared and intimidated than I was before I had looked to the internet for help. There were a few girls that were inspiring and I let them know through email that their outlook on their diagnosis had helped to change my perspective. Unfortunately, most of the time, the negative outweighed the positive and I was stuck in a nightmare of my own imagination. What I remember feeling the most is alone.

I tried my best to put one foot in front of the other and to be as open about my ostomy and new lifestyle as possible. I went back to work for my boss at an event planning company in Columbus, Ohio, I started to feel better. The physicality's of my disease were gone, but what I was left with was the emotional side.

Knowing how to dress properly and still feel pretty, how to look at myself naked without cringing, how to hold my head up high when a stranger noticed the bulge underneath my shirt, trying to be intimate, dealing with the care of my ostomy, what was normal and what was not – all of these thoughts plus more would rush through my head, making me upset and scared.

The one thing that stuck out in my head, were those stories of the inspiring girls I had read after surgery. The ones that brought tears to my eyes and made me feel like I wasn't alone. I wanted to read stories like that all of the time. Have a touchstone that I could turn to for guidance and an outlet to be able to not only help myself, but most importantly, to help others.

Because if there was one thing that I knew, it was that even though I felt alone, I was not alone. I could not be alone. There has to be other people out there going through the same situation as me – probably worse, who would be more than happy to share their story in order to help encourage other patients who were living with inflammatory bowel disease.

I did have a blog at the time, where I shared my personal accounts of life with ulcerative colitis. I knew I loved my blog, I have a degree in public relations, and I have a strong passion for writing and for meeting new people. I love print magazines. The stories on those glamorous glossy pages of people making a difference in the world; the girls dressed in incredibly fashionable outfits that influenced readers so profoundly. I remember reading and looking at them when I was younger and thinking, “I want to work for a magazine one day.”

I also had a new muse, my disease, my cause. I wanted to change lives. The thought of Companion Magazine occurred to me when I was driving to work one day. I remember thinking, “I want to create a magazine that people can turn to, where patients can share stories and friends and family members can read and try to understand more about inflammatory bowel disease.”

I had recently met a friend on social media named Kristin, who was facing the same struggles as me. I shared my idea with her and she thought it was amazing. Kristin is a graphic designer, so as a team, we developed Companion Magazine for IBD.

I spent the next few weeks feverishly putting all of my time and effort into this new project. Kristin worked hard designing covers and logos, while I wrote the mission statement and tried to put together a website and social media pages. I didn't know how to do any of it at the time, I had to call a professor from Otterbein, tell her my ideas and quite frankly ask, "How do I make this happen?"

My professor gave me a list of to-do's; I also had some help from a former classmate who had started her own online magazine as well. I have to thank my classmate, Rae, she took so much time writing to me on Facebook and on email on how she started, giving me tips and advice.

Everything else Kristin and I figured out on our own. I promoted our magazine on the social media sites, and my blog. I started new relationships with people who have made a big difference in the IBD community. At the same time I was beginning this project to help reach out to others, what I didn't realize was happening is that it was helping me heal at the same time. It was giving me a chance to see the beauty in what I had seen as only a beast.

I was making friends from all around the world. I had countless emails in Companion's inbox of people wanting to write and to show support for what Kristin and I were doing. Our twitter conversations and following grew to be almost out of our control. I had planned for our first issue to be only about 15 pages and I had thought I was going to have to write most of it.

When our first issue came out on December 4<sup>th</sup> of 2013, we had over 60 pages and I am proud to say I had only written one of them -the letter from the editor. We had over 1,200 views overnight from all over the world. People in countries that I hadn't thought of since 7<sup>th</sup> grade geography were reading my magazine. The best part about it – **they were telling us that we were helping them. That our magazine was making a difference in their lives.**

Today, we have 5 issues all online. I have an amazing staff of 4 other editors, plus contributors who are so brave and willing to write for me. It's truly amazing. I have gotten the opportunity to talk with people from all over the world who have not only written incredibly inspiring pieces for me, they have changed my life, they have helped me to heal.

Companion Magazine is the best gift I have ever given to myself. The emails that I receive from people telling me that our magazine has put a smile on their face in their darkest hour is better than any amount of money. The friendships I have made with my editors and contributors are ones that I will have for the rest of my life. We have felt the same suffering and we support each other in the most insightful and deep ways.

Gaylyn asked me to write this to show how truly important the power of the written word is. There is no amount of paragraphs that I can write in this article to explain that. All of the medications in the world couldn't heal me, but my writing, creativity and independence did.

Companion Magazine is my greatest accomplishment. I am so proud of myself and so thankful to those who have made my dream come true.

*If you haven't read Companion Magazine, please visit our website at [www.companionibd.com](http://www.companionibd.com). If you are interested in advertising or contributing to Companion, please email [companionibd@gmail.com](mailto:companionibd@gmail.com).*