In 1994, at 19, I was diagnosed with Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia (CML). I was told the only hope of survival was a bone marrow transplant. A bone marrow transplant is basically that they "kill" you to "cure" you. I had to have total body irradiation (like being at ground zero at Hiroshima) and the most lethal chemotherapy. Since my diagnosis, life has radically changed. I had the transplant and have had an exceedingly "challenging" recovery. For the first three years post transplant, I was rehospitalized constantly, went to the emergency room countless times, and had life threatening complications. I had medically induced Gran Mal seizures, jaundice, hallucinations from the wrong medications, pneumonia many times, infections, dehydration, threw up literally pounds and pounds and coughed for two years straight.

A lot of people, friends and family, helped out… and a lot of friends couldn't relate at all. It was very isolating and scary. Conversation was no longer "normal." Life was no longer "normal." There was no day and no night. Emergencies happened all the time. I was on very high dosages of steroids over a long period of time. Steroids are muscle wasting, and I lost all semblance of a sleep cycle. I was on TONS of medications, most of which had dangerous side effects. Especially steroids. The best way to describe being on steroids, is the painting by Munch, "The Scream," multiplied by 1,000.

I have also had to have several surgeries, including having three bones in my right wrist removed. I have had to deal with extreme changes in my physical appearance. I went down to 70 pounds because I was put on the wrong steroids, and lost a lot of my hair again because of such severe malnutrition. I've had to face the possibility of my death over and over and over again, but I have never given up or given in. I have been bruised and battered, but never beaten. The treatment caused me to go into menopause (at 20) and I cannot have children. I had severe Graft-vs-Host Disease (GVHD), the potentially fatal "side effect" of the treatment. My skin became extremely tight, rigid and thick. I started martial arts to help… basically everything, and I moved to California because I need to live in a moderate climate.

I'm a 12 year survivor who only had about a 15% chance of even making it at all. I've worked hard not to be a "victim," but to handle myself with as much grace, humor, class and courage as possible. I was taken off disability, so I have no medical coverage and/or prescription coverage even though I still have numerous medical conditions. I must get infusions of immunoglobulin every couple of months because my immune system has been so compromised. But I've overcome every obstacle that's been thrown at me.

I've taken a test to become an optician, created a life for myself in CA., and started martial arts again.

I am a CHAMPION!

I have the "Eye of the Tiger!"

A Real Life “Rocky.”