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## LFC student fights to expand knowledge of Crohn's disease

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When Ally Bain, 19, of Vernon Hills was 14 years old, she was shopping with her mom and felt a sharp pain in her abdomen. Having been diagnosed with Crohn's disease three years earlier, Bain knew all too well that she needed to find a restroom - and fast.

Crohn's disease is an inflammatory bowel disease, which causes swelling in the intestines. The most common symptoms of Crohn's disease are abdominal pain and diarrhea. Rectal bleeding, weight loss, arthritis, skin problems and fever also can occur. It's important for those with the condition to use a restroom as soon as possible when symptoms occur.

But when Bain asked an employee at the store to use the store's private bathroom because a public one wasn't available, the employee called the manager. Doubled over in pain and crying, Bain asked the manager to use the private restroom and explained she had Crohn's disease, but the manager refused. She ended up having an accident.

"The manager dismissed us and said, 'I'm making a managerial decision,'" Bain said. "It was a humiliating experience, and on the way out my mom promised me it wouldn't happen to me or anyone else again. I didn't know how true those words would be. That was how I found my voice and got involved with legislation."

Passing a law

Instead of letting the embarrassing situation get the better of her, Bain took action and began sharing her story in hopes of making a difference. She contacted District 59 State Representative Kathy Ryg (D- Vernon Hills), and the two got to work creating legislation they presented in Springfield.

In August 2005, the Restroom Access Act, also called Ally's Law, was passed in Illinois. The law states that a retail establishment that has a private toilet facility for its employees has to allow a customer to use that facility during normal business hours if the toilet facility is reasonably safe and several conditions are met.

And Bain didn't stop there. She also speaks at nonprofit organizations, pharmaceutical companies and medical facilities about Crohn's disease, and she works closely with the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation of America (CCFA) and the United Ostomy Associations of America (UOAA). She also was the honored walker at the CCFA's Take Steps Walk last year in Chicago.

"It has definitely taught me that one young person with a singular voice can make a difference," she said. "I never imagined that morning in the store that I would start on this legislative journey. I tell people I would even thank that manager because that humiliating incident ended in this positive law. I hope it shows people they have a voice."

Ally's Law has been passed in about 12 other states and is pending in others, said Bain, a 2008 Vernon Hills High School graduate. And she has plans to expand it.

'New level'

"I'm kind of taking my activism to a new level," she said. "I want to get the law passed on a federal level, and I plan to speak with U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D- Illinois) to do that. He expressed interest in the past, so now I'm going to take him up on that."

Bain is in remission from her Crohn's disease, but she has had three major surgeries and nearly died because of the condition - and not a moment goes by when she feels sorry for herself.

"My best friend has a similar condition, and we commonly agree with each other that we wouldn't trade our illnesses for anything because it serves as a constant reminder of the service we can provide to others who don't believe they can speak out," she said.

To share her message with others, Bain is working on a young-adult memoir with author Fern Schumer Chapman. Bain will be a sophomore at Lake Forest College next fall and is working on the book this summer through the college's Richter Apprentice Scholars Program, which provides students with the opportunity to conduct independent, individual research with Lake Forest College faculty. Schumer Chapman is a former

advisor of the college's newspaper, The Stentor, and Bain worked as a staff reporter and deputy copy editor at the paper.

"She and I became really close," Bain said of Schumer Chapman. "It has been extra special working with her this summer. She's a great mentor to have."

Although Bain is receiving funding through Lake Forest College for her book this summer, she needs the financial support of sponsors, organizations and individuals to continue the process of writing and publishing her book.

Bain is majoring in communication and minoring in political science at Lake Forest College, and she plans to attend graduate school. She also will continue her work with Crohn's disease.

"I think it's important because it's a matter of your rights," she said. "If you don't stand up for your rights, you can't be sure who will. Even in this economy, there are still people out there young and old who are willing to fight for what's right."

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