

## 2001 HS Scholarship Winner

(1 of 2 for 2001)



### Michelle C. Meade

When people say to me 'I feel so horrible,' I think to myself, "they have no idea what feeling horrible really is." I have, for the past two years of my life, been living with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. After fighting with mononucleosis for most of my sophomore year, I thought my life would return to normal. I was entirely wrong. I continued to wake up each morning feeling tired and could not seem to rid myself of a swollen, painful knee. Although my parents and doctors were concerned for my health, I seemed to be the only person who was taking this seriously. After numerous tests for almost, every disease imaginable, my doctor concluded that I had Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. This, however, did not fully account for the fact that the pain in my left knee continuously bothered me. It was not until after I was tested for rheumatoid arthritis, and put through months of physical

therapy that I was, diagnosed with Fibromyalgia in addition to Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, which meant, the pain was here to stay.

Every day I wake up with some degree of pain and fatigue, but I have taught myself how to adapt and deal with my illnesses as a normal, but important part of my life. I now know that I can be myself without having to compromise anything because others often consider me "sick." My life has changed in a tremendous way, and I have become a better person because of this experience. The future that lies before me is the same one that did before I was diagnosed with two conditions that not many people have ever heard of. My dreams and aspirations of becoming a veterinarian have not been deterred based on my health. This experience has thankfully made my values slightly different. I appreciate every day that I can go out with my friends, watch my brother play sports, walk my dog around the block, or sit down and talk with my parents. I do not think "Today I'm going to be sad", "Tomorrow has to be fun." I simply live each day as it or is presented to me in the strongest way possible.

In my mind, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia are not two paralyzing illnesses; they are two of greatest sources of strength. I have been able to recognize the fact that I will have to live with these conditions for the rest of my life. I know no one can truly understand what I experience on a daily basis, but my family and friends have become more aware of what and how I'm feeling. I not only have the powerful memories of being diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia, I have the strength to deal with these illnesses. I'm looking forward to graduating in June, and while it; has been necessary to make adjustments to get to this point, I have managed to maintain balance in my life.