“Tiffany can I speak to your parents alone please?” The doctor asked even though it was more of a command than a question. I was only fifteen years old but I did not have to be a scientist to know that my test came back positive. After thirty painful minutes of my thinking about the bad news I was about to hear, the door opened and he called me into his office. I fought hard not to cry since I already knew what he would say. I looked at my mother sitting across from me; she could not even look at me as a tear rolled down her cheek. I could not even listen as they told me that I tested positive for Friedreich’s Ataxia (FA), so I focused my gaze out the window. It was an awful view, a side of a brick wall with a bird flying by. I just wished I could have flown, like that bird, out the window; just get away, anywhere but there. . . .This disease that I was faced with at age 15 has no cure and a lot of people do not make it past 30 years old. I will be one of the few who do.

Initially, I did not feel that way. About three months after hearing the news of FA and my heart disease, I was diagnosed with depression. . . . After a year of therapy, my counselor told me that I have overcome my depression. Depression is not the way to live; you only get one life so you better make the best of it. This experience allowed me to regain my focus. I have begun to organize fundraisers, and I have given talks at local schools about my disease. With the help of others, I have raised over $25,000 to go towards research to find a cure. I am not going to let FA hold me back. . . .I have goals, and I know what I want to do in the future and I am not going to let anything get in my way. . . . .I want to further my education so that maybe one day I can help people, like I once was, by teaching them that they are in control of their life. It was the most important lesson I learned. This disease does not define who I am, I define who I am.