

"Thanks to Humira, I'm no longer a prisoner in my body," says Susan with her family.



ey," Dan prayed. Me, too, Susan silently added. But she was afraid to get her hopes up. Yet it wasn't even a full day later when Susan felt as though someone had switched on a light in the darkness. "Look," she marveled to Dan, flexing her fingers. And the next morning, she

Stricken with rheumatoid arthritis at just 22, Susan Caritey went from an outgoing, athletic young woman to a pain-riddled wife and mom who felt as if her life was slipping away from her. Then a pioneering doctor—and a breakthrough new drug—changed everything . . .

A miracle cure for Susan

Another morning had come. And as Susan Caritey stood in the shower, warm water cascading over her aching body, she couldn't tell where her tears ended and the spray began.

You can get through this, she told herself. But the Pittsfield, Massachusetts, mom of two had had enough. How much pain can one person bear? she wondered in despair.

It was another morning two decades earlier when Susan first awoke to soreness in her muscles and joints. She and her husband, Dan, had just returned from

thought. Not newlyweds. Not 22-year-olds!

"It'll be okay," Dan comforted that night. And Susan wanted so much to believe him. She was lucky to have Dan, to have love. She could handle this. They could handle it together.

But after just six months, the arthritis had damaged Susan's wrists so badly, she could hardly lift a coffee cup.

At work as a labor and delivery nurse, Susan began limping down the hospital halls and had to let her colleagues administer IVs—her ravaged hands couldn't manage them. Soon, Susan was swallowing up to 18 aspirin a day—and they didn't even touch the pain. And because she loved shoes, her closet was filled with sexy heels and funky boots, but her feet were so swollen the only ones that fit were sneakers with untied laces.

Where did I go? Susan sobbed, looking in the mirror, sinking into a deep depression. The young, healthy Susan had been replaced by a weak stranger.

Then something wonderful happened. "I'm pregnant!" Susan told Dan.

She was prepared to add morning sickness and sciatica to her list of aches, but as if by a miracle, every symptom disappeared.

Maybe I'm cured! Susan dared to dream. And when Brianne was born, Susan marveled that a body that had created such pain could also create something—*someone*—so beautiful.

But soon, the pain and inflammation returned.

"Sometimes the hormones of pregnancy put autoimmune diseases into temporary remission," a rheumatologist explained when the same thing happened after Susan gave birth to Daniel.

Daniel learned to walk early, as if he somehow knew Mommy didn't have the strength to always carry him. And Brianne didn't seem to mind that Mommy limped into her dance recitals, as long as she was there. But no matter how many #1 Mom Christmas cards the kids drew, Susan feared she didn't measure up. They deserve more! she agonized.

After battling RA for more than a dozen years, a friend referred Susan to University of Massachusetts Medical School rheumatologist Charles Birbara, M.D.

Right away, Susan liked Dr. Birbara—his compassion, his confidence.

"This is an aggressive disease," he said. "We'll treat it aggressively." He gave her anti-inflammatory injections and a free pass to see him, no appointment necessary.

But as her kids grew, so did Susan's symptoms. Dr. Birbara prescribed countless medications, yet none worked. Susan cut back her hours, then eventually stopped working. Just sitting at Brianne's equestrian events and Daniel's swim meets proved excruciating.

"Did you see that?" Brianne gushed after guiding a mare to jump a hurdle. And though Susan tried to hide her pain, she winced.

"My poor Mom," Brianne said, the pride in her eyes turning to worry. "You're

hurting, aren't you?"

Oh, sweetie, Susan's heart screamed. You should be celebrating, she thought, not worrying about me!

Now, as Susan awoke to another miserable morning, she held her head in her hands. For two decades she'd been a prisoner to pain.

"Something better will come along," Dr. Birbara had kept reassuring Susan. But when? she sobbed. What if it's too late?

Later that day, the phone rang.

"I just got word," Dr. Birbara began. Clinical trials for a new drug called D2E7, also known as adalimumab, were beginning, and he was in charge!

D2E7 was an amazing breakthrough because it not only targeted the toxins in the body that cause swelling, but also prevented the erosion of joints, halting the progression of RA. Best of all, there didn't seem to be any side effects.

"Are you willing to be a guinea pig?" he asked.

"I'm ready!" she sang.

Soon after, Dr. Birbara gave Susan an injection of D2E7 in her hip.

"I hope this works, hon-

awoke without stiffness for the first time in . . . forever!

"Maybe it's wishful thinking," she told Dan and the kids, "but I feel . . . good!"

"You look good, too, Mom," Daniel agreed.

And with each weekly injection, the magic multiplied.

"I finally have my life back," Susan thanked Dr. Birbara for D2E7, which will soon be FDA-approved as Humira. "There's no

"Maybe it's wishful thinking, but I feel good!" Susan said

stopping me now!"

Today, the woman who once could barely climb out of bed has boundless energy. Putting 23 years of pain behind her, Susan's gone back to work, takes hikes and does aerobics.

"C'mon," she winked to Dan at the 25th anniversary party Brianne and Daniel threw them recently, taking him onto the dance floor. "We've got a lot of lost time to make up for." And twirling in his arms, she knew her heart was dancing once again, too.

—Elizabeth Holzemer

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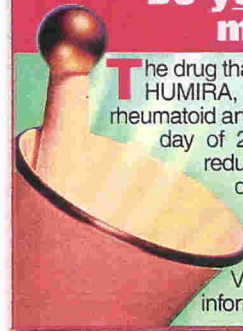
their honeymoon. Maybe it's jet lag, she thought.

But when the weariness didn't wane, Susan—studying to be a nurse—grew worried. A doctor confirmed her suspicions: she had rheumatoid arthritis (RA), an autoimmune disease that causes the body to attack its own joints.

"Is it curable?" she asked. "The best you can do is take aspirin," he replied.

Tears welled in Susan's eyes as a movie played in her mind: the fast-paced walks she and Dan enjoyed together, the places they planned on visiting—the Pyramids, the Eiffel Tower. Old people get arthritis, she

Do you need the new miracle drug?



The drug that gave Susan her life back, now called HUMIRA, is now available to all patients with rheumatoid arthritis. Approved by the FDA on the last day of 2002, HUMIRA has been shown to reduce the joint swelling and stiffness of the disease. "Studies have also shown it can stop the erosion of cartilage and bone around the joints, stopping the disease in its tracks," says spokeswoman Tina Ventura of Abbott Laboratories. For more information, log onto www.humira.com.

Has modern medicine worked a miracle in your life? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: Success of Modern Medicine, *Woman's World*, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. If we print your story, we'll pay you \$250. Submissions may be edited for style.