

# YOUTH SCENE

## My Plans in His Hands

by Ashley Lay, Mobile, Alabama

I am a planner. At age 15, I had my life perfectly planned. Not only was I certain I'd become a veterinarian, I already knew the vet school I would attend. I loved sports, especially softball and had just made the high school tennis team. I played the clarinet in band and also did Flag-line during marching season. I had a perfectly planned life. What I didn't plan on was getting sick.

One afternoon, while at school, I noticed swelling in my legs. My legs very soon became more and more swollen. Mom took me to a doctor and they ran some blood tests. The doctor told me I had Lupus—a disease I had never heard of before. He explained to me and my family that Lupus, an autoimmune disease was causing damage to my body. Normally the body's immune system makes proteins called antibodies, to protect the body against viruses, bacteria, and other foreign materials. With lupus, my immune system could not tell the difference between foreign substances and its own cells and tissues and began an attack on my healthy body, especially my kidneys. We rushed to Little Rock for a kidney biopsy. Heavy doses of chemo and steroids immediately followed.

Though I felt really tired and drained, I went along with it all, doing my best to keep up my happy-go-lucky attitude. But then the medicine and the symptoms of the disease took their toll on me. Blood clots in my legs and in my lungs threatened my life. I felt exhausted all the time. For six months, I was a couch-potato. That good attitude I tried to hold on to was becoming impossible maintain. Friends whom I thought would stick with me through everything didn't bother to visit or call anymore. But I didn't blame them. They were all moving on with their lives as planned. My world had crashed to a jarring painful halt. Gloomy thoughts raced through my head. *I'm all alone. I hurt all the time. Nobody understands what I am going through. Why did God do this to me?*

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I attempted my junior year, but it didn't work. I could only go to school about every other day. My high school didn't really want to deal with me. It looked like everyone was giving up on me. Then depression really set in. I realized that all of my plans were going down the

drain. I went from having my future planned to wondering what my future would be to then wondering if I would even have a future.

Somehow I mustered up enough determination to tackle a homebound study program. I taught myself and finally earned my G.E.D. I wanted to go to college as I had always done well in school, but I had lost my sense of who I was and who I would be. *Could I even manage college?* Then a family friend offered me an opportunity to live with her family in Phoenix and work as a nanny for her kids. It sounded like a good idea—a new start. My health was improving and I cared for the kids and took a couple of classes at the community college. I went to church



sporadically, but I wasn't really focused on God. I knew that deep in my heart I hadn't forgiven Him for what had happened to me. He had let me down just as my friends had let me down.

Then my dad, who is a priest, got offered a job to pastor a church in Mobile, Alabama and I moved with my family. I started back into college in Mobile and joined a sorority. Then a small change began to take place—not a dramatic change, but a slow subtle healing change. As I began to feel better physically, God began to heal my heart. I began to pray more, go to

church more and regularly receive the Holy Eucharist. I began to journal to God, telling Him how I felt. I wrote and wrote many letters to Him. It was my way to communicate with God.

Then my eyes began to slowly open. Through praying, journaling, and going to church, I began to see and understand that God had not abandoned me. Through my journaling to God, I began to let go of my anger. I began to understand that God is and had been like a gentle father, watching out for me, and holding me through my worst moments. I felt His love. I began to accept my illness and trust that God must have had a reason for allowing it. Through it, my faith has grown. I accepted that I could put everything his hands and go with it.

Last summer I attended our Anglican youth camp. I realized that while I had been going through the motions at church, I didn't really understand the motions. The workshops at the camp taught me more about why we do what we do at church. I came away learning a lot about my faith, about my church, and about God.

I still want to plan my life, but I now know that God is the ultimate planner.

Though I feel better, I still deal with daily pain. My hands get sore and sometimes my hands and feet just don't work well—things healthy people take for granted. I try to exercise daily and that makes me feel loads better. I take about six different medications each day and go to the doctor every six weeks for blood tests to make sure my organs are okay. My disease is in remission, but it can become active any time.

About my plans? I'm asking God if I should continue on with college and my plan to become a veterinarian. I still want to be a vet, but my future is still questionable and I wonder if I will make it that far. My time could be up before I finish that goal. But I'm optimistic and I trust my plans and my life unto God. I talk to him now about these things and I'm working on listening and watching for His answer. Above all, I trust that God has it all planned out for me and His plans are the best plans.

