



it as happy, even though it was filled with hospital visits and scary procedures. I'm currently still healthy and at 18 years of age will be graduating high school and moving into adulthood. I hope that sharing my story will encourage all, that life can still be filled with enjoyment if you're sick with any life-altering illness despite the difficulties you may experience.

I don't know if there was a specific moment when I found out I was diagnosed with Sickle Cell Disease and thought my life was over. I only remember my parents being there satisfying my every need and want. I remember my family always hugging me and telling me that they love me. My first crisis at age 7, in elementary school, not only left me feeling pain but embarrassment that I collapsed in front of my classmates.

As I got older, I started to see my disease as not being routine; I wasn't in control over it, and I was right. I had been exposed to treatments, daily medication, and a depressive thought that this is all that my life consists of and I wasn't normal. When I was in my teen years and finally hit puberty, I started to act out so I would fit in but even the slightest actions couldn't change the fact that my health needed to be taken into serious consideration 24/7.

June 16, 2014, I decided on my own to truly be committed to giving my life to Christ. Since then everything started to change inside physically and mentally, emotionally healing my thoughts and body. You can say it was with better medications, treatments, or home life but only God got me through those hardships.

Growing up I went through so many stages of grief. I managed to get through those with the help of my strict parents. Of course, I appreciate they don't want anything to happen to me, but I'm already 18 years old and I need to live my life before I regret it. I know my parents are here for me. There are many reasons why my parents are so strict. My parents are

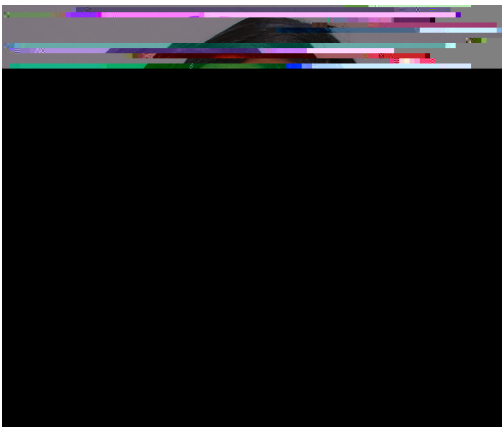
overprotective. It honestly frustrates me when half the time when I'm never allowed to go anywhere with my friends or go to places without my parents having to be right next to me.

I understand they want to protect me because they love me, and I appreciate it, but growing up being ill in a strict home with strict morals, I learned what the text book recognizes as "Special Treatment" throughout my childhood meant to my siblings. It took a bad turn on my mental state especially when I started to get bullied. I have been diagnosed with Sickle Cell Disease since birth, so growing up I always could handle whatever obstacles that came my way accept what was happening in my life whether it's in my control or not. All I ever wanted to do was try to fit in with my peers causing me to be judged at home about my actions. Overall, I look back and think about my childhood and I missed out on a lot. It upsets me knowing what could've been, even though sometimes I wanted to commit suicide but I knew that wasn't the solution to my problems. My life will always be tough but we have to stay strong and get through it the right way.

People were seeing me getting treated like I was lost and needed to be cared for. This also made me take risks for what I considered to be "Love". The truth is it didn't matter how anybody treated me and for once I got to call the shots for myself. As I keep going on with life learning and growing, this experience has shaped me in so many ways. I'm the best person I can be and I don't blame my parents nor myself. I've come to learn great lessons out of this, to love all, and to move forward knowing everything happens for a reason, and to not let this interfere with the greatness that is about to become of my life in the future. Talk about sharing my story, this is closure to healing old wounds, said with the most honest and loving regards I can of telling my Sickle Cell Journey."

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## Meet the USA Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center's Newest Addition to their Pediatric to Adult Care Transition (PACT) Program



The USA Comprehensive Sickle Cell Center invites you to join them in welcoming their newest member, Cimone Smith, MHA.

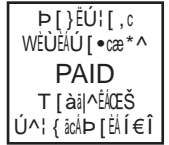
Smith is a native of Beatrice, Alabama and graduated with her bachelor's degree in Pre-Professional Health Science/Informatics from the University of South Alabama in 2014. As a student at USA, Smith worked at University Hospital as a student assistant in the Department of Radiology where she assisted in keeping the electronic records of diagnostic studies performed using Powerscribe 360. While pursuing her master's degree she served as a consultant, coordinator, project manager and liaison for the quality department at one of the area hospitals. While there she participated in the development, evaluation, planning, and implementation of new technology and



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