

TOUCHED BY LYME: Lyme disease awareness through figure skating

Thirty-year-old Amber Van Wyk was 10 when she laced up her first pair of ice skates and it was “love at first glide.” She became immersed in the world of figure skating—untold hours of practice, learning the art of choreography, years of competition. Later, she skated professionally, first at Knott’s Berry Farm, and then traveling the world with Disney on Ice. Eventually, she gave up touring and became a choreographer working with young skaters in Minnesota. Figure skating continued to be her passion, her artistic canvas, the sanctuary where she felt most at home spiritually.

Then, in the fall of 2009, something happened.

About a week after she and some young skaters took pictures

near some long grass in Lakeville, MN, she developed an extremely high fever and was out of commission for a few days. ("I had no rash, no indication of a tick bite. I never even gave it a thought.") When she returned to the ice, her balance and coordination were off and she felt dizzy when she skated. She soon developed numbness on her left side.

"I believe skating saved me from waiting too long before really investigating," she recalls. She spent a year visiting doctors, including top specialists, but none could figure out what was wrong. Once she dove into her own research and found Burrascano's extensive list of Lyme symptoms, she knew in her gut she'd discovered something important.

Then, she went into overdrive to get tested appropriately (receiving a "very positive" Lyme western blot from Igenex Labs) and found a doctor willing to help her. In treatment since December 2010, Amber says she has shown major improvement since then but still has a long road ahead.

Although far from her former skating self, she can get out on the ice and train. "I have to make room for bad days and allow myself those," she says. "I still can't spin, but I can skate and jump." Even with restrictions, the act of ice skating remains her pride and joy.

Amber is "heart-broken and angry" about how the political controversy surrounding Lyme disease makes it so hard for people with Lyme to get properly diagnosed and treated. She supports LymeDisease.org's petition to get the IDSA's Lyme guidelines removed from the National Guidelines Clearinghouse. ([Click here](#) to read more about that.)

To help spread awareness, she has created a music video (set to the haunting song "Storm," by the band Lifehouse) which contrasts her "skating self" with her "Lyme self." It starts out with a stark, handwritten message: "This is my reality...my storm...this is Lyme." It packs a powerful punch, intercutting

footage of her lovely ice-skating with dramatic shots of IV antibiotics and other Lyme-related paraphernalia. It ends with a plea to sign the petition.

She made the video to help create awareness about how devastating Lyme disease can be. "The only way I know how to do that is through my art."

Watch Amber's video:

[Click here](#) to sign the petition.

TOUCHED BY LYME is written by Dorothy Kupcha Leland, LymeDisease.org's VP for Education and Outreach. Contact her at dleland@lymedisease.org.