



# Profile:

## Autumn Bousquette

By Trudie Mitschang

AS A BUSY college student and foster mom, Autumn Bousquette was accomplished at juggling activities. But her life took a sharp detour when an unexpected health crisis led to a diagnosis of common variable immune deficiency (CVID). Autumn knew she could either wallow in self-pity or totally throw herself into living a full life again. After seeking out other CVID patients online, Autumn not only discovered a new community of friends, she also met the man who would become her husband and soul mate.

**Trudie:** Tell us about your life before CVID.

**Autumn:** I have always been in good shape. I was a gymnast for 13 years, a cheerleader and I ran track. I also worked on the assembly line at Ford Motor Company in Michigan. When the economy crashed, I took a buyout from Ford and, during that time, I worked out daily and walked. I eventually moved to Arizona to attend college at Arizona State University, and I became a foster mom to three kids under 5 years old.



*After countless hospitalizations and an initial misdiagnosis, Autumn Bousquette was finally diagnosed with CVID and is now treated with subcutaneous immune globulin.*

**Trudie:** When did your symptoms start?

**Autumn:** While living in Arizona, I began to get sick more frequently. I was suffering bouts of bronchitis, but nothing too severe. I was given an inhaler, and my doctors were concerned because my sodium level was extremely low, putting me at risk of a seizure. During that time, I was frequently hospitalized, where I was given sodium IVs. Even with all of those challenges, I never worried that anything was seriously wrong. Countless times after my blood was taken by the nurse, the doctor would walk in and joke: "Sorry, you must be the wrong patient; you don't look this sick!" Life was busy, and I have always been a fighter, so I just kept trucking along.

**Trudie:** What happened the day you collapsed on the stairs?

**Autumn:** The day I collapsed was a typical morning. I remember feeling grateful I was still under contract with Ford and had insurance until college graduation. After a normal morning at school, I made my way back home to my upstairs apartment. It was a hot day, but it was typical for Arizona. When I climbed up the stairs, I suddenly started to have breathing issues. Within four to five steps, I could not go any farther. I sat on the stair and called my friend who drove me to the hospital. After checking my vitals, they immediately checked me into a room, and a team of doctors and nurses came running in. I was terrified. The next thing I remember was waking up strapped to a bed in the ICU with a breathing tube down my throat. During my time there, they ran a lot of tests. It was brutal.

**Trudie:** What were you tested for?

**Autumn:** They were trying to figure out if I had pulmonary fibrosis since it runs in my family. My uncle, and we assume my mother, had pulmonary fibrosis and possibly CVID.

**Trudie:** What was your first diagnosis?

**Autumn:** When I was finally discharged from the hospital, I went home to Michigan with a misdiagnosis of pulmonary fibrosis. I saw a couple of pulmonary doctors, but I was not very happy with any of them. I was not willing to give up, so I found a new doctor.

**Trudie:** When were you finally



diagnosed with CVID?

**Autumn:** On a routine visit to the pulmonologist, one of my doctors sent me to an allergist and immunologist for additional testing, and written on the referral were the letters “CVID.” That was the first time I had heard of common variable immune deficiency. Although I didn’t understand it, that finally led to a diagnosis.

**Trudie:** What is your treatment plan?

**Autumn:** Immediately after my diagnosis, I was prescribed home infusions of subcutaneous immune globulin (Hizentra). I educated myself with every bit of knowledge I could gather, and I still learn more daily. These days, I infuse Hizentra monthly at home while watching Ellen DeGeneres.

**Trudie:** How did you meet your husband?

**Autumn:** It worked to my advantage that CVID did not make me look sick, so I joined an online dating site and a Facebook group. I was asked out quite a bit, but once my dates found out

think he truly understood how sick I was at the time, but of course, he soon found out. My husband is an incredible man. I don’t know how I got so lucky. These days, we have date nights, lazy nights, vacations and so much more. We are avid gardeners. We go to a ton of live concerts/shows. Life is great! He is my best friend.

**Trudie:** What advice do you have for other patients?

**Autumn:** Do your homework. Ask questions and read everything you can to educate yourself. You are your own advocate. Listen to your body and stay zebra strong!



*Autumn took advantage of her invisible disorder and joined an online dating site where she met her “best friend” husband.*

This journey has taught me that life is short. It really is important to embrace every moment like it is your last.

about my health conditions, they ran. Ironically, Dave, who is now my husband, asked me out constantly, but he was a single dad with two teenage daughters, and that scared me. Thankfully, I finally said yes, and we hit it off within minutes. We talked for six hours before he went home. I don’t

**Trudie:** Besides helping you meet your husband, how has social media helped you cope with CVID?

**Autumn:** I had always been active on social media, and I was so thankful that I typed in CVID in the search bar of Facebook. That led me to connect with several support groups for our

rare community, and it was a lifesaver. I have always wanted to help others, and social media became an outlet to encourage others and let them know they are not alone.

**Trudie:** What has CVID taught you about yourself?

**Autumn:** This journey has taught me that life is short. It really is important to embrace every moment like it is your last. You never know how fast it can be cut short. It has reminded me to tell everyone how much they truly mean to me and to endeavor to live life to the fullest. In many ways, this diagnosis also taught me how strong I really am. For that, I am grateful.

**Trudie:** What are your goals for the future?

**Autumn:** I hope to go back to work one day, and I hope to outlive my mom who died at age 47. I am 44 now, and there’s still so much I’d like to accomplish. I could write a book on my hopes and dreams, but it would never have an ending. ■

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