

My mom and dad are carriers. In fact, I come from a family of carriers. My grandparents are carriers, my cousins are carriers, even my older sister is a carrier. They all carry a single copy of a genetic mutation.

I too am a carrier. But I carry two copies, which translates into Cystic Fibrosis. It attacks my body, haunts my thoughts, and threatens my existence. Some days, my parents choose to carry a full-toothed smile, reassuring me that everything will be alright, but other days, an anxious expression outweighs the smile, reminding me of the realities of the difficult future that I face.

Although I carry this disease, it is something that I typically choose to leave behind.

On the outside, I carry the necessities of an average eighteen year old girl: my license, my phone, plenty of hair ties, and my wallet. Digging a little bit deeper into my purse, though, live the other essentials I carry, which more closely mimic those of an eighty year old man: a baby blue inhaler for my tired lungs, an alcohol swab and a razor-sharp needle, a wide assortment of pills and medications, and a vast collection of tissues and lemon flavored cough drops. During class, on the soccer field, and outside of school, I carry an unsuspecting smile and a contagious laugh, careful not to let others look or reach too deep inside my purse. The items that I carry in my purse represent the stories that I am too scared and not yet ready to tell.

Along with stories, I carry the weight of my unacknowledged feelings. Sometimes, my feelings carry me. My built up feelings of sadness, frustration, and jealousy always simmering on the surface, sometimes boiling over. I carry a constant anger: anger at my situation, anger at myself, and anger at the outside world. I wonder

why I was the one chosen to carry these items. I wonder how I can continue carrying these things, and whether or not my purse will continue to bear the weight, or just fold into itself.

But there are also days when I carry a much lighter weight, days when I am not sleep-deprived, getting over a vicious cold, or feeling totally frustrated by my situation. On these days, I still carry the same inhaler, pills, and cough drops, but they just seem to weigh less. On days when my disease does not hold me prisoner, and I have a little more room in my purse, I carry some extra items, including money to go out to dinner with friends, my beaten down running shoes, and a feeling of relief. But by the end of the day, when I am exhausted and have a raging stomach ache, I am reminded that I will always carry this illness.

With my illness, I carry a powerful story. Ultimately, I carry the power to defy the limits of my physical body and define myself not by the burdens of my disease but instead by the obstacles I surmount each day as I strive to live the life of a normal teen.

And with my story comes a responsibility to tell it. Though my purse may be heavier than that of the average eighteen year old, I understand that the things that I carry are not meant to remain hidden in its depths, but are to be shared with others.