

2018 Courage Award Finalist

# SHANNON JOHNSON

BEFORE



AFTER



**A**t 18 years old, it was love at first lift and I had dreamed to one day compete in a figure bodybuilding competition. Fate, however had a different plan for my life.

In my early 20's, I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease and Rectal Cancer as a result from the disease. From 1998 to 2005, I was in and out of the hospital and underwent 11 surgeries before I was in the clear. The end point of all the procedures and surgeries left me with an ileostomy for life. Yes, at 21 years of age I had a bag on the outside of my body for life. Not only was the realization enough, I had very hurtful rumors started about me by people that did not know me or my situation, saying because I was so thin 88 pounds to be exact, I either had an eating disorder or I was strung out on drugs.

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From 2006 to 2014, all the negativity, the Crohn's Disease, the medication and the ileostomy controlled and affected my quality of life. I had very low self-esteem, and little confidence.

Late 2014, I decided to take control of my life and become healthier and happier. The first thing that popped into my mind is the love and passion I once enjoyed in bodybuilding all those years ago. I slowly worked my way to getting off all but one medication and started to gain weight and regain my confidence. While going through the journey and after talking with my coach, I realized that the goal I once had of being a figure bodybuilding competitor, could actually come true.

In September 2017, I decided to face all my fears and commit to doing my first figure competition. This meant I would be walking out on stage in a bikini to face the world with my bag on my stomach, which I always kept concealed. Almost a year later, I competed in my first figure competition at the 2018 NPC Kentucky Open. I registered to compete in four classes. I ended up bringing home three trophies, 3rd Place – Figure Open Class D, 4th Place – KY State Figure Open Class C, 4th Place Masters 35+.

Even after the show and seeing the pictures, I found myself being very self-conscious about the bag showing, but then I realized that I have overcome a lot of obstacles in getting to this point. I truly believe that I have been blessed to have come so far and that I can hopefully give back to others by being an inspiration.