

# 2022 STENE PRIZE RUNNER-UP

## EVARDIKI IOANNOU

### *Cyprus*



My name is Evrdiki Ioannou and I am 35 years old. I am married and have an eight-year-old daughter. I live in Larnaca, a small town in Cyprus, with my family. I love playing tennis, reading books and gardening.

Professionally I work as a civil engineer for Larnaca's municipality

I learned about the Edgar Stene Prize competition from the Cyprus rheumatism organisation's Facebook page. I chose to participate in the essay contest because I love writing. Mostly though, it was because I wanted to give courage and an optimistic message to all those people who have to face rheumatological diseases and, especially, lupus.

I would like to encourage all these people and show that we can fight our monsters and not to give up.

## 2022 STENE PRIZE - RUNNER-UP ESSAY

### **Dealing with my disease affected my hopes for the future**

“Lupus... Systemic lupus erythematosus, my dear.” That was the diagnosis of the doctor in his white coat, with his little round glasses and a blank stare who, when I was just 20 years old, announced to me, with regret, that I was suffering from a strange autoimmune disease with an awful name.

Lupus... I felt like Little Red Riding Hood: small, helpless, frightened, with my red cloak falling off me and spreading like a pool of blood at my feet. What is this? Its awful-sounding name foretold something dark, something terrible, something frightening.

### **Happily ever after**

Indeed, it was something dark, something terrible, something frightening. I looked into it, I asked about it, I later felt it on my skin when it was devouring me savagely, when it wrecked me mentally, when it took so much away from me. But I will not talk at all, not one bit, about the symptoms and the afflictions of this disease because, today, I will tell you my own optimistic, happy fairy tale which has a happy ending. Because, deep down, every single one of us dreams of – and strives for – a fairy tale with a beautiful ending where we all live happily ever after.

So, my friends, I never forgot about Little Red Riding Hood – small, a bit innocent, a bit thin and so powerless against the strong lupus (wolf) but so determined, so brave, so courageous. I decided to follow the survival instructions of my favourite fairy tale’s heroine. These instructions were simple and child-like, but helped me to be full of courage, tenacity and resistance against the fate that had been dealt to me. So, I gathered up my courage, stood on my feet, cleaned off the mud which was soiling my beautiful red cloak, tied it tightly around my neck and, like a superhero in a comic book, I fought till the end. I turned around boldly and faced my blood-thirsty enemy, and declared in no uncertain terms that I would win. His bright red hideous eyes glared, his sharp claws ready for a fight, huge, flesh-eating, ready to attack. But I had already won... The poor guy didn’t know it yet though: the moment I had decided that I would fight him, I had already won my first battle.

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# 2022 STENE PRIZE - RUNNER-UP ESSAY

(continuation from page 1. Essay "Dealing with my disease affected my hopes for the future" by Evrdiki Ioannou)

## **Fight for the future**

With the help of my dearest doctor – who in my fairy tale plays the role of the kind woodsman – I have been tirelessly fighting my rabid enemy who has been coming after me, relentlessly, for 15 years now. He has caught up with me many times and has inflicted wounds upon me, reaching deep down to the bone and delivering powerful bites. But I always get up and run even faster, stronger, with more tenacity and the will to live. Along with my good doctor, I have other helpers too. My mum, who always has a little basket with the essential helpful cakes ready; my dad with his little lantern always lighting my way in the deep darkness; a prince to help me in the battle; and my smallest, but strongest helper, my daughter who, with her sweet little eyes, gives me the strength and courage to get out of the deep darkness, to see the light and to fight for the future... A future without bad wolves (lupus) or a future with wolves (lupus) that can be beaten.

Since I made the decision to fight with every means I had in my hands – science, technology, psychology, pharmaceuticals – I have achieved a lot. It has been with great difficulty of course, but I feel that I have achieved a lot. I feel proud of myself for my victories and even for my defeats because I had the strength to heal my wounds as best I could and move ahead undeterred. I never gave up on my rights for employment in a difficult sector – the construction sector. I never abandoned my right to love, to fall in love, create a family, get an education, have a social life and friends. On the contrary, I passionately claim all these things in my own way and with my own strength.

## **No limits**

My dear friends, I know that us rheumatism sufferers have many difficulties to face in our lives, both physical and psychological. But I want you to always remember Little Red Riding Hood – her courage and persistence, her will to live – and I want you to fight this monster devouring you from the inside with all the strength you have in you. Our goal will always be to beat the beast and come out winners. We can work, we can have a family, we can have friends, be functional and productive. But it takes a lot of effort to strike a balance, to overcome the fear and to fight in order to claim all those things which others achieve easily. However, as my favourite author Nikos Kazantzakis puts it: "I have come to realise that when you fear something, be it a lion, a person or a ghost, you should face it head-on and you will see your fear immediately go away". Don't let your lupus defeat you. A person's strength has no limits.

With endless love and understanding

Your fellow fighter

Little Red Riding Hood.