

## MY STORY

**My name is Kate Wood (nee McMaster) and this is my story.**

I was never sick or injured as a child. From the age of 10, I was the Australian 800m champion and was undefeated for many years. I left our rural property in the northwest of New South Wales (NSW) and went to boarding school when I was 13. While I continued to train and race, running was put on the back burner while I competed in other team sports at the state and national level.

I can now say that in 1996 my life changed forever. I went on a school camp in northwest NSW for seven days. Eight days after I returned, I realised that the itchy lump on my back was neither a mole nor a pimple; it was a tick. The school nurse removed it, and I thought nothing more of it. I don't believe I had the characteristic erythema migrans (EM) rash that looks like a bullseye and indicates with 100% certainty that you have contracted Lyme disease, but not long after I had my first proper flu. My glands became sore and swollen and I became extremely fatigued. Tests showed that I had glandular fever and very low iron stores. I was prescribed an iron supplement and rest was ordered until I recovered.

I had qualified for an international athletic tour of the US later that year and didn't want to stop training, as I was really looking forward to traveling and competing again. I had a few weeks off and did the best I could with my training leading up to the trip. I ran well considering my lack of preparation and picked up a few medals, but came back exhausted. At least I had the rest of the year off to recover.

I will never know if it was that tick in NSW that gave me Lyme disease or even if I picked up something while competing in the US, but either way my health issues began with that tick bite. If only I or the doctors looking after me at the time had known to test for Lyme disease back then, how different my life might have been. Having said that, I have no regrets. I have learned many valuable life lessons and had many wonderful things come out of my Lyme disease journey.

I continued to train and compete but never at the same level as I had before the glandular fever diagnosis. The right gland in my neck never went down, and I often had a sore throat, dry cough and lost my voice. I would become easily fatigued, had headaches for the first time in my life and got this weird rash on my hands and feet that I was told was a fungal infection. Doctors said it was because I had gone through puberty and my body was different. As a teenager, it sounded logical to me.

At the end of 1997, I convinced my parents to let me leave boarding school and come home to train with my coach, Mr. Manning, while completing my year 11 and 12 studies at the local high school and via correspondence. I was so excited to have the opportunity to train

like I used to and regain my national title, but it didn't go to plan. Even though I put hours of extra training and stretching in, fine-tuned my diet, started visualising and did more than I had ever done to get my health and fitness back, something just wasn't right. It wasn't coming as easily as it had before. I was getting niggling injuries and often felt rundown and fluey. I blamed it on hormones and having gone through puberty, since now I was carrying a little more weight than I used to as a child.

I got picked in the 1998 Australia Oceania under-21 team and travelled to Tonga to compete. Although I came home with three silver medals, I was quietly disappointed, as the times I was running were equivalent to times I ran when I was 13 (and I was 17 at the time). After that trip my health declined and I started getting really bad cramping and stabbing pains in my calves. The more I ran, the worse it got, until one day I was racing school cross country and my legs gave way on me; I couldn't stand up or feel my feet. I had a stack of tests done which indicated my iron levels were dangerously low and that I was so extremely deficient in magnesium and potassium that I should have been dead. I started supplementing with both and also ate three or four bananas a day as the doctor had instructed, but the pain persisted. I had been taking iron on-and-off for a couple of years, so some questions were raised as to why my iron stores were still so low. I missed winning the national 800m final that year by one-hundredth of a second and realised it had to be more than just a nutritional deficiency.

My mum and I travelled to Sydney during the school holidays to see all the top sports' doctors, and it was then that I was diagnosed with compartment syndrome (where the fascia doesn't expand as the muscle does during exercise, limiting blood flow in and waste products out). The options were either surgery to slit the fascia or six months with no running and limited walking to see if the fascia would recover naturally. I chose the latter, throwing myself into weekly physiotherapy and acupuncture, and daily deep tissue massage and stretching to try to stretch the fascia.

In April 1999 I did my first walk/jog session and slowly began to train again. My calves felt fine, but I just couldn't get fit. I could barely run the 2 km warm-up (even as a 10-year-old, I used to run 8-10 km with my eyes closed and here I was nearly 18 and could barely jog 2km), and the more I trained, the more unfit I felt. I kept telling myself it was because I hadn't exercised for six months and my body was just really unfit. Then I started getting headaches, heart palpitations and severe chest pain. My short-term memory was affected, which really impacted my study for my Higher School Certificate (HSC), because by that time I was in my final year of school.

I got sick, my glands were swollen and inflamed, I had a dry cough that wouldn't shift and I'd often have a sore throat and lose my voice. I could barely get out of bed some days, let alone run. My mum took me to the local doctor who did an ECG on my heart. The result?

The strongest, healthiest heart he had ever seen. My mum then took me to a cardiologist who gave me every test under the sun including an exercise ECG, angiogram and ultrasound. Everything was normal.

After multiple exams and tests by a plethora of doctors around the state, including a SPECT scan of my brain (by this stage, I was having excruciating headaches daily), it was decided that it was all in my head and I was prescribed antidepressants. My parents were beside themselves and thought maybe I should try to take the antidepressants to see if that helped. I had rarely even taken basic over-the-counter pain medications like Panadol®, so I wasn't about to start taking some psychotropic drug; I knew it wasn't in my head.

I was lucky that at least one person truly believed I wasn't faking it or creating it in my head, and that was my coach, Mr. Manning. He found a biochemist and suggested that my mum take me to see him. By this stage I was sleeping up to 18 hours a day and was starting to get seriously depressed. I wondered if I would ever be well again. I felt helpless and hopeless and would often cry myself to sleep with my head under my pillow, so as not to worry anyone.

The biochemist in Rutherford believed that I had picked up a parasite in Tonga, since I had been much sicker after returning from there. He said my liver had a fatty buildup (possibly affected by the glandular fever) and that my ATP levels were affecting my energy levels (ATP stands for adenosine triphosphate, the biochemical way the body stores and uses energy for every cell in the body including your muscles). As a biochemist, he made all of his own supplements and medications, so to this day I still don't know what he prescribed, but it worked! Initially I got really sick and had a huge rash all over my body. He said it was my liver detoxing and that I needed to have lots of water and veggie juices to support the detox pathway. Within eight days the rash died down and my head cleared a little. Over the next few months I went from strength to strength and had enough energy to return to school for the entire day and do some social activities. My right gland never went down and to this day, if it gets sore, it is a warning for me to slow down. My short-term memory has also never been the same, but I learned ways around it by writing things down and getting good at using diaries and reminders.

Note: The biochemist who helped me is now in jail for fraud because he claimed that he could cure cancer and one of his patients died. Although I'm sure his claims were not communicated well at his trial, I know his intentions were sound, and I truly believe he saved my life at the time.

In 1998 I finished my final exams and slowly got back into my athletic training. I received a scholarship from the Australian College of Physical Education at Homebush Bay to study Sports Science and moved to Sydney in early 2000 to pursue my beloved athletic career while also getting an education. Over the next few years, I worked my way back and was

ranked #3 in Australia in the 800m event, but my body was never the same. I had many injuries that kept setting me back, I would often get sick in my easy training week, and I would always struggle to run well if I had to travel. I had blood tests every 4 to 6 weeks to monitor my low iron levels, and I also had many other tests, such as stool tests, gastroscopes, a colonoscopy and other blood tests, to determine why my body was either losing iron or not absorbing it. Once again, many doctors were involved and no one could work it out, so they decided low iron was “normal” for me!

In 2006 I broke the navicular bone in my foot in a race after a stress fracture was misdiagnosed. I was absolutely devastated, as I was in contention to earn a spot on the Melbourne Commonwealth Games Team. I was told I would never run again if I didn't have an operation to put a screw in the bone. Whether I had the operation or not, I wasn't going to recover in time for the Commonwealth Games, so once again I opted for the natural route. That meant having my foot in a cast and then a boot for three months, followed by another three months of daily rehabilitation and crutches.

By this time I had graduated from Sports Science from ACPE and was studying chiropractic part-time. I decided to study chiropractic full-time so I could rehab my foot properly and also earn my Master's of Chiropractic so I could always pursue an exciting career of helping others once I had finished competing. After finishing my Master's of Chiropractic, getting a job, meeting the man of my dreams and starting Health Space with my now husband, I never did go back to racing.

Fast forward to 2012...Both my husband and I were bitten by a tick in February. Once again, we didn't think anything of it after removing it. In April we did a whirlwind trip to Las Vegas and Los Angeles, and I returned feeling a little tired. Since we were planning to start a family at the end of that year, I researched and found a good holistic doctor. I thought I should get some blood tests, have my iron levels checked and make sure I was ovulating, all while doing a six-month preconception detox. I hadn't been to a doctor since I retired from athletics in 2006, so it was time!

After what I thought would be some routine blood tests to give me the green light, my second visit to the doctor was both surprising and scary. My white cell count was dangerously low, my liver enzymes were through the roof and there was likely something seriously wrong with me. Differential diagnoses that needed to be ruled out included cancer, leukaemia, Lyme disease and HIV, to name a few. From the start, my doctor, Dr. Kate Norris, thought that I had Lyme disease, and it was really only because she was so thorough and dedicated that I was diagnosed with Lyme five months later.

At first I was in denial. I had researched medical sites but the symptoms and diagnosis didn't exactly fit. As more tests came back positive, such as mycoplasma pneumonia (which explained all the sore throat and dry cough symptoms I had over the years), EBV (Epstein-

Barr virus, which causes glandular fever), HSV1 (herpes simplex virus), a strong case was building up. All the Australian testing came back negative for Lyme disease, so I thought I was in the clear and went on a holiday to Europe for the month of July. It was while I was traveling, I realised something was really wrong. I was so fatigued that I had to have a sleep everyday, my hair was falling out, any scratch or sore I had would take ages to stop bleeding and heal, I became extremely constipated and I had all these sores on my skin that just wouldn't heal. Once I got back home I saw Dr. Norris. She convinced me to get a western blot test for Borrelia, which was sent to IgeneX Labs in California to test for Lyme disease. Five weeks later the results came back. They were positive for Lyme disease.

I struggled to come to terms with the treatment recommended: three different types of antibiotics at very high doses, indefinitely. I reached out to many doctors, friends and health professionals for advice and came to the conclusion that if I didn't do the antibiotic regime along with all the natural options, I wouldn't get better. Once I made my decision I never looked back, and I have no regrets. I was committed to everything I put my mind to and had in my head that I would be better in 3 to 6 months maximum. I convinced myself that in the scheme of things it wasn't such a long time, especially since I had been sick on-and-off since I was 16!

I cut all dairy, gluten, caffeine, processed foods and sugar from my diet, bought all certified organic produce, made sure all my home products (cleaning, cosmetics, etc.) were all certified organic and stopped aerobic exercise so I could give my adrenals a rest and allow my white cells a chance to recover. I took all the supplements that were recommended, started meditating every day and committed to treatments such as Rife, acupuncture, Reiki, kinesiology, lymphatic massage and, of course, chiropractic. Sometimes I would drive hours each day just to get these treatments. I was blessed to have so many colleagues, friends and clients to help me, and it was rare that I paid for a treatment, for which I was extremely grateful.

Six months later I was so much worse. I was blacking out, extremely fatigued, had severe headaches and jaw pain, my eyesight had diminished to a blur, my hearing was super sensitive (to the point that even the hum of a dryer could drive me crazy), I had a rash all over my fingers and toes that would burn like my hands were being held in a fire, and my short-term memory and brain fog were so bad that I couldn't remember a simple word like *honey* or even my close friends' last names. I was stressed and depressed and began to give up hope of ever getting better.

I had a consultation with Dr. Nicola McFadzean, who recommended that I focus on the treatment for Babesia, as she believed that I had 90%+ of the symptoms. I also started looking into other treatment options and came across a clinic in Bali, which I had decided I wanted to go to. Then a friend of a friend suggested trying Germany, as there was a well-

established clinic in Bad Aibling that was getting great results with Lyme disease patients. I spoke to both clinics and realised that I needed to detox before I could do either program. The next day I woke up and decided that I had given antibiotics a good go and was done. That was it, no more antibiotics as of March 2013. The other thing that made a huge difference was getting a root canal tooth removed, as I believed it was harbouring infection.

I chose to go to the St. Georg Klinik (SGK) in Bad Aibling, Germany. In hindsight, I wished I had gone as soon as I was diagnosed. I truly believe that this is what helped me turn the corner to full health again.

Eleven months post Germany I am clear from my doctor that not only was I physically better, but all my blood tests and functional tests were in the “optimal” range. After I left the German clinic, I worked very closely with my doctors (Dr. Kate Norris and my naturopath, Kelly Galvin) doing in-depth functional and gene testing and using nutritional changes and supplements to ensure every system of my body was functioning optimally. The most exciting news came in May 2014. My husband and I decided to start trying for the family we had longed for, and I fell pregnant on the very first try! Not only that, but the pregnancy was a breeze - no nausea, no sickness and not even a hint of tiredness. All I can say is that my healthy pregnancy was a great sign that my body was finally functioning optimally. On February 17th at 7.19am my life changed forever with the birth of our son, Maxim Cruz McMaster Wood. It was not the serene home water birth we had planned but the end result was the same - a beautiful, healthy baby boy. All the heart ache and suffering through Lyme disease (and labour!) were worth it to have this beautiful little miracle in my arms. The baby I had longed for and at many times in my life thought may never happen. He is such a miracle and every single day I am grateful to have him ground me and make me fully understand the beauty of life. Thank gosh I didn't give up on life when it would have been so easy to.

I tell you my story not because it is so different from many other Lyme disease sufferers, but because I want to inspire you to listen to your heart and know that there is life after Lyme disease. It is my hope that I can be the one person who makes a difference for you by providing up-to-date and specific information about Lyme disease and its treatment options, so you can get back to being the best version of yourself, just like I am. Take it one step at a time, and remember that you are never alone.

I have a book coming out in October 2015 which will tell my story and also help people suffering with chronic illnesses, like Lyme disease, the physical, biochemical, emotional and spiritual support they need to get well again.