





My Lungs Are Slaying a Dragon

**Story by: Isaac Dalhoff, Student
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It is March 13th, 2020, and I am struggling to make it up the stairs to my dorm.

My mother always liked to comment on my immune system. It wasn't uncommon to see me walking into class sick. Half of the time, I was. My recovery from a simple cold usually took one month and two weeks before I stopped my sniffles and wheezes. Then, one month later, I'd feel another scratch creeping its way into my throat.

On March 11th, 2020, I expected that little scratch to come and go as it always did. One month, two weeks, potentially a slight pneumonia spell. Nothing I couldn't handle.

I wasn't ready for that flame that buried itself in my lungs. A cough that felt like a dragon spitting bloody fire—I can still taste the iron—brought to life every time I left my room. I knew this wasn't a regular cold.

I fought that dragon every day for one week. Any flight of stairs became a taste of its breath in my mouth. There were so many flights of stairs. I began to question who to call if I started to lose this battle.

By the end of the week, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was found in Wisconsin: Eau Claire, Wisconsin. I chuckled through my flames when I heard that. I guess I had met the dragon before the state. I had its signature of early antibodies to prove it.

It is six months later. My taste is back, and my joints no longer hurt to move. But those flames never fully receded. Any coughing spell risks that taste of iron returning, and before I know it, I am on fire again. I watch myself on the stairs now. They're no longer mountainous, but my breath quickens much sooner. Even a deep breath fills me with dread. If I push myself just a bit too far, I'm forced to remember that dragon.

But I continue to push myself.

I love to bike. I love the feeling of those secluded trails where roads fade away and prairies sing with life. The wind brushing my face and fresh, cold air pouring into my lungs. For a while, I thought the dragon had robbed me of this. And for a while, it had. I could only make it a couple of blocks before I had to stop to hold off awakening it.

But then I kept going.

I tested it. I tested my lungs. And soon every expedition was just a couple of minutes longer. A couple of miles longer. I reached points in the trail that I had never seen before. Because now these lungs aren't fighting to keep me alive, they've fighting to live.

It is now one year later, and I can finally breathe again. Long and deep—never quite as deep as before—but these breaths are special. They come in spite and repose. These breaths know that they are slaying a dragon.

Artists:

**Megan Miller, Student
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

**Cody Vander Loop, Student
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire**

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