



Katie Watson, 16
Apex, North Carolina

Katie Watson is a vibrant 16-year-old high school student from Apex, North Carolina. She is the co-editor of her school newspaper and very involved in the theater program at her school. Like other girls her age, Katie enjoys hanging out with her friends and participating in extracurricular activities. However, her life changed dramatically when she contracted whooping cough, a highly contagious and serious disease. In the US, thousands of people suffer from whooping cough each year and nearly 30 percent of these cases occur among preteens and teens.

In 2004, at age 12, Katie developed what appeared to be a common cold. But the cough became constant and it began to affect her breathing. Her parents rushed her to the doctor where they learned – much to their surprise – that Katie had contracted whooping cough. Katie's parents had made sure she received the vaccine to prevent the disease when she was younger. What they didn't know was that the protection would begin to wear off five to 10 years after the completion of the childhood whooping cough vaccination. Unfortunately for Katie a booster shot wasn't available when she was diagnosed with whooping cough. Booster shots became available the following year, 2005, and were recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for preteens and teens in 2006.

Katie suffered from severe and painful coughing fits that made it very difficult for her to breathe, eat and sleep. Her cough lasted about **100 days**. Katie had to miss two weeks of school and it was hard for her to keep up with her studies. That wasn't all that she missed during what she called "the worst experience of her life." She was too tired to socialize. And while her friends were supportive, they were worried about catching the disease. She also had great difficulty playing the flute for about three months in her school band.

Thankfully with the help of antibiotics, rest and relaxation Katie recovered fully. She is happy to be healthy again and to help spread the word about the importance of protecting against whooping cough.