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Food Talk Brings Kidney Community to the Table

Winners of the 18th annual Essay Contest announced by Renal Support Network

GLENDALE, Calif., September 24, 2020 – Renal Support Network (RSN) celebrates its 18th year of providing a platform for people wishing to share their inspirational stories of living with chronic kidney disease. The theme of this year's essay contest is ***“Thriving, No Matter What I Can or Can't Eat: A Happy Food Experience on the Kidney Diet.”*** Smart food choices are a key element of living with a chronic illness, and writers enthusiastically responded to the theme by sharing their interesting food anecdotes as well as their discoveries for improving their health, well-being, and daily lifestyles. Entrants needed to meet only one criteria — to have been diagnosed with chronic kidney disease.

“Food is always a favorite topic,” says Lori Hartwell, President and Founder of RSN, “But when you have kidney disease your diet can be challenging. We have a following of amazing writers, and they were up to the task of delivering thought-provoking, insightful, and often humorous accounts of their dietary journeys. RSN has a panel of judges to help us determine the essay winners. It was a tough choice this year. We received over 100 essays from across the United States and we are grateful to everyone who took the time to share a personal story. I read each essay with pride, tears, and admiration for the courage of my peers. In addition to this year's essay winners, we wanted to acknowledge 10 outstanding essays with honorable mentions. We are asking each essay winner to record their story. And, to have a broader reach of inspiration and hope, RSN will have them translated into Spanish.”

This year's first place winner, Kristin Brunstein, says, *“Writing an essay about my diagnosis was really cathartic for me. Being able to share my story with others is an honor. I am open about my diagnosis and limitations because it is a part of who I am. But it does NOT define who I am.”*

2020 Essay Contest winners and President's Pick are:

- 1st Place – “Eat, Wink, Thrive,” by Kristin Brunstein, Auburn, AL
- 2nd Place – “Happy as a Clam,” by Elizabeth Howard Usher, Barboursville, WV
- 3rd Place – “Cooking with a Renal Twist,” by Makeisha P. West, Minde, LA
- 4th Place – “Kidney Diet Hero,” by Joseph Hardison, Plymouth, NC
- President's Pick – “So Long Mrs. Freshley's,” by Mike Gothard, Beaufort, NC

RSN is proud to announce the following Honorable Mentions:

- Honorable Mention – “From the Philippines, with Love,” by Josh Mackenstein, Beaver, PA
- Honorable Mention – “Accepting Dietary Limitations,” by Sheri Sinykin, Sun Lakes, AZ
- Honorable Mention – “No Reason to Fail,” by Yessenia Gutierrez, Miami, FL
- Honorable Mention – “Dead Man's Curve,” by John Burris, Westfield, MA
- Honorable Mention – “Fly Me to the Moon,” by Joy Araujo, Fishers, IN
- Honorable Mention – “Stop Lying, Start Living,” by Arthur Debose, Bloomfield, NJ
- Honorable Mention – “Motivational Moderation,” by Rev. Marjie Dozier, Goldsboro, NC
- Honorable Mention – “A Summer Day Picnic,” by Debra Dansie Anderson, West Jordan, UT
- Honorable Mention – “OH NO! AVOCADO!” by David Wills, Riverside, CA
- Honorable Mention – “You Never Know Unless You Try,” by Sandra Kisselback, East Berne, NY

Renal Support Network

Hartwell selected as her President's Pick: "So Long Mrs. Freshley's," by Mike Gothard, of Beaufort, NC. "This essay spoke to me through its use of humor and dialogue, and how dietary changes can be made when choosing to live," Hartwell says. "Sometimes we need a nudge from the people who care about us."

Cash awards were given for First Place (\$500), Second Place (\$300), Third Place (\$100), and Fourth Place (\$100). Honorable Mentions and the President's Pick also received cash awards (\$100 each). All participants in the essay contest will receive a small gift in the mail.

The large number of hi-quality essay submissions RSN received this year illustrates the potential for hope and inspiration. Through their words, these writers are encouraging others to tell their stories of struggling with chronic kidney disease. Winning essays, and additional information about kidney disease and organ donation, can be found at www.RSNhope.org.

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RSN is a nonprofit patient-run organization that provides nonmedical services to those affected by chronic kidney disease. RSN strives to help kidney transplant recipients, and those who are newly diagnosed or on dialysis, develop their personal coping skills, special talents, and employability by educating and empowering them to take control of the course and management of the disease. www.RSNhope.org.