



**Heather Evrley**  
**Loxahatchee, FL**  
**Born 1972**  
**Diagnosed 1994**

*"I do not let epilepsy define who I am or get in the way of achieving my goals—being an active parent, scholar, wife and published author."*

As a college student, Heather Evrley spent her time attending class, studying and hanging out with friends. She also worked as a waitress, trying to pay for college and earn enough money to buy her own car. After pinching pennies and saving tips, Heather got it—the little white car she had dreamed of for so long. Her hard work had finally paid off.

But everything changed the day that Heather experienced a seizure. She was taken to the hospital and, after four days of tests, received news that came as a shock—she was diagnosed with epilepsy. Little did Heather know, she had actually been having seizures in her sleep for years. The diagnosis was difficult for her to accept—especially the loss of her driver's license. The car she had worked so hard to afford sat gathering dust in the driveway, and monthly car payments were a painful reminder of the freedom she had lost.

Heather became determined to reclaim the independence that the seizures had stolen. She took her medication regularly and the seizures became less frequent. Still, Heather often experienced dizziness and felt that her sense of awareness was "off." A friend suggested she see an epileptologist—a neurologist who specializes in epilepsy—for a second opinion. The epileptologist ran tests and discovered that, in addition to the tonic-clonic seizures Heather already knew she experienced, she had been having 20-30 complex partial seizures per day. For more information about epilepsy and seizure types, please see [About Epilepsy](#).

Heather felt reassured to have an explanation for that odd sensation she had been experiencing, and was even more relieved when the epileptologist prescribed another medication that reduced that feeling. Today, while Heather still experiences some seizures, she feels more like herself than she has in a long time.

Most importantly, Heather has not let epilepsy keep her from living her life. For example, she met her husband, Eric, while she was in college waiting tables. One of the first things she told him was that she has epilepsy. They spoke for hours, and Eric got up the courage to ask Heather out. The day they were supposed to go on their first date, however, Heather had a seizure. Needing to stay home and recover, she called Eric to cancel, but he refused. Instead, he came over to her house and spent time with Heather and her family.



The rest is history—Heather and Eric have been married for twelve years and she is now a devoted mom living in Florida with Eric and their two children. Heather has always stayed busy: over the years, she has been a high school English teacher, debate coach, Girl Scout troop leader, and PTA member. Today, she is preparing to apply to law school so she can one day become a prosecutor.

Heather's first priority is always her family—she meets her son and daughter at the bus stop every afternoon and cooks her family dinner each night. For many parents, cooking a family dinner is unremarkable, but for Heather, it is an impressive feat. She has burned herself a number of times because she experienced seizures while making dinner. Unwilling to stop cooking for her family, however, Heather now wears silicone oven mitts to protect herself and continues to cook every night.

Heather has faced other unique challenges, as well. Eric is in the military, which has caused the family to move frequently over the years. With each move, Heather has had to build a support network of friends and neighbors in her new community.

Realizing that others can benefit from her experience, Heather became an Epilepsy Advocate. She hopes her story will help those living with epilepsy understand that they, too can lead full lives. Heather advises others to take a proactive role in their care from the moment of diagnosis and to seek treatment with the goal of achieving seizure freedom with minimal side effects.

According to Heather, "When I was first diagnosed with epilepsy I was afraid I would lose my identity. But, I quickly learned that I am not defined by epilepsy. I found that by taking control of my health and working with my doctor, I was able to find a medication that helped better control my seizures. Now, I live life on my own terms."