

A man with short hair and a beard is playing an electric guitar on stage. He is wearing a dark t-shirt with a graphic that says "RAMO" and "TOEY DEE". He has tattoos on both arms. The lighting is dramatic, with blue and purple hues.

Strength, Crohn's & Rock n' Roll

"I hope that people know that the CCFA is an organization that they can turn to and that they no longer have to feel alone."



No doubt IBD is a tough fit for the rock-and-roll lifestyle. Weeks and months on tour, a new venue each day, hours on stage, far from the comforts of your own kitchen and bathroom...the challenges sound insurmountable. But Mike McCready, lead guitarist for Pearl Jam, is here to tell you that it can be done.

At a Seattle benefit luncheon in May 2003, Mike publicly acknowledged, for the first time, his 16-year battle with Crohn's disease. A brave step for a rock icon. But, by stepping forward, Mike hopes to foster an open dialogue that will increase understanding and provide a better life for those who share his battle, especially younger people diagnosed with IBD.

At events, Mike speaks of the shock of being diagnosed as a 21-year-old, trying to make it as a rocker in Los Angeles. "It was something I was ashamed of for many years," he says. Eventually his worsening symptoms led him to move back to Seattle to be close to family and friends and, slowly, things got better. "I started learning how to manage my symptoms after many doctors visits and lots of medications."

The forming of Pearl Jam in 1990 again turned Mike's life upside down. Touring with the band was a huge challenge, both onstage and off. But as anyone with IBD knows, living with the disease is a journey and you can get better at managing your symptoms as you go along. Mike's disease is currently in remission and he spends a great deal of time helping others, reaching out again and again to help the group who may find IBD most devastating: recently diagnosed teenagers.

"I hope that by coming forward with my story and being open about my disease and all the embarrassing symptoms of IBD, others around me can become as empowered as I have and realize that it is okay to have IBD," he says.

Mike and his fiancée, Ashley O'Connor, have provided tremendous support to CCFA's Northwest Chapter, helping to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars to promote IBD research and education. He has spoken at many chapter events and given broadcast interviews. His friends and family have participated in races and walks. Members of Pearl Jam and Mike's other bands have donated their time and talent to CCFA benefit shows, in addition to making generous donations to the foundation.

For Mike, it has already been a long road. It has taken him from feelings of affliction and agony to bringing the house down before screaming crowds and churning out nine-minute miles at CCFA races. But Mike will be the first to tell you he did not do this alone. "I hope that people know that the CCFA is an organization that they can turn to and that they no longer have to feel alone."

Contact your local chapter and get involved. Others can benefit from your experience, and you will benefit from theirs. IBD is a challenge, not a sentence. And if Mike McCready can take IBD on tour with Pearl Jam, maybe you can find the strength to take it where *you* want to go. ■

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