



## **Drew Meisegeier** *2010 Arthritis Walk Child Champion*

For most of us, childhood is a carefree time to explore, play, learn, and bask in the attention of our loving parents and grandparents. Eight-year old Drew points to his grandfather as his hero, admiring his strength and military knowledge. Although both of his grandfathers have arthritis, Drew says that they don't let it slow them down. Unlike his grandparents, however, arthritis struck Drew when he was only five years old. The burden of having arthritis at such an early age means that Drew, now eight, has few memories of what it is like to be healthy.

Because Drew's arthritis makes it difficult to open and close buttons, write, and cut, he knows that he must take his medicine in order to attend school. "If I don't take the Remicaide, my hands won't work right until about 11:00 in the morning." Drew observes that compared to other kids in school, he is absent from school frequently, must receive more shots, and sometimes he must go to the infusion center. This year alone, Drew has had 27 scheduled doctor appointments. This doesn't include additional appointments for when he is not feeling well.

The significant time that Drew spends away from school because of illness or doctor appointments means that he is missing out on his favorite subject, math, and on the daily interaction with his classmates. It means that he will need extra support from his teacher and parents so that he doesn't fall behind academically.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic inflammatory disease of the joints that affects an estimated 300,000 American children. The disease can also affect many organs, including the skin, heart, blood vessels and lungs. Drew's doctor is not sure yet what type of arthritis he has—either polyarticular juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, or psoriatic rheumatoid arthritis.

Drew's ten-year old brother Josh, who does not have arthritis, is sensitive to Drew's limitations and struggles. For example, Drew is not allowed to do gymnastics because he is not supposed to use trampolines. Finding a facility that does not use trampolines has been difficult. However, with optimism and determination Drew does flips in his basement, plays with his friends, and when he is not at one of his doctor appointments, he pursues many of his interests. Like many eight-year olds, Drew likes baseball, playing Wii, reading, drawing, eating, playing with his brother's adorable fur-ball guinea pig, watching his fish, traveling, and riding loop-de-loop roller coasters. His favorite show is *Ed, Ed, and Eddie*, and his favorite movie is *Ed, Ed, and Eddie's Big Picture Show*.

Drew's optimism extends to his hope to find a cure for arthritis, and perhaps best captures why he is a champion. "I want to raise money so people who create machines to help people who are diagnosed with something like arthritis can create machines so that arthritis becomes extinct, like dinosaurs."

**Join Drew and his team, *Drew's Crew* on Saturday, May 15<sup>th</sup> at the DC Arthritis Walk!**  
**For more information, visit <http://2010arthritiswalk.kintera.org/dc>.**