

FIRST DRAFT

Many girls wake up on their sixteenth birthday happy and excited. They look forward to a day revolving around them and they throw a big birthday bash to prove it. My sixteenth birthday was not like that. Instead of a “Sweet Sixteen,” my hormones gifted to me a Septic Sixteen. My father’s side of the family is famous for bad genes. You name it, obesity, embarrassing facial hair, acne; my dad’s side has it. Unfortunately for me, I got his acne. So when I hit the teenage years, it was painful cysts, annoying whiteheads, and stubborn blackheads.

I could get over the pain of the blemishes though. I could not, however, get over the way the blemishes made me feel. I felt like my face was an advertisement screaming out to everyone that I was incapable of basic hygiene. I remember a few years ago, my aunt came to visit from Texas at the same time I was having an enormous breakout between my eyebrows. When I went to say hello to her, I kept my head bowed because I was embarrassed of the acne. I wanted my aunt to think I was pretty, and with the acne, I felt pretty far from that.

At that moment, I decided to wage a war with my hormone-causing acne. I had been using over the counter face washes, which clearly were not working. Therefore, I quickly scheduled an appointment with a dermatologist, Dr. Greene, who prescribed Benzaclin. The medicine cleared up my skin wonderfully, which was a huge relief to my teenage self. Looking in the mirror was no longer something to be dreaded. Washing my face was no longer a painful task. Instead, it was kind of fun. I loved running my fingers over my smooth, porcelain like skin. I loved the way I looked, and I found the confidence that I needed.

BenzaClin, however, also gave me stomach cramps and aches. I decided that clear skin was not worth any amount of pain and took matters into my own hands. I immediately stopped taking the medicine, hopped onto my computer, and researched. I found out that BenzaClin

contained clindamycin, which is one of the most effective antibiotics in treating acne. It also, however, causes pseudomembranous colitis and stomach pains. Of course, I was the tiniest bit crushed that the most effective treatment for acne may be causing some internal damage, but I had to move on and find something that suited me. I researched everything from oral supplements to face washes to topical gels. In truth, I did feel very much like a Sherlock Holmes who was unveiling the truth behind the unpropitious side effects of Maryam's hormones. Through various websites, I discovered one of my main problems was a lack of vitamins A and B and of probiotics. I, therefore, went out and immediately started taking a dietary supplement called "Akne-Zyme" to load up on my vitamins. Then I bought Activia yogurt, which is famous for helping with regularity due to the large amount of probiotics it contains. I saw some improvement after a few days. Instead of feeling satisfied, however, this improvement only whetted my appetite for the porcelain skin the Benzacilin offered. I then decided to search for a new face wash. I remembered that my mother told me that Sheseido products were her savior when she was my age, so I sprinted to closest Shesiedo counter and picked up the products that suited me. Again, I saw improvement. The last step to achieving my perfect skin would be the topical gel. I researched tons of gels without clindamycin, and the two that interested me the most were Retin-A and Differin. Both medications had some form of vitamin A, which I already knew helped me through my Akne-Zyme supplements. The side-effects of both medications were irritation and minor discomfort, so I decided to talk to Dr. Greene.

I once again sat in Dr. Greene's office, which was decorated with magazine cut-outs that featured his advice on acne. He was excited to see my skin clear up, and he was even more excited to help me choose a topical medication. "Retin-A is a lot more powerful, so I think we should go with that first." I quickly nodded in agreement, eager to try it out. It turns out,

however, that Retin-A was a little bit too powerful for me. I went back to Dr. Greene, again, and this time we tried the Differin. Thank goodness it worked, because frankly, I was running out of medication options.

Of course, I'm very proud that my acne has cleared, but I'm even more proud that my desire to be proactive and research and learn has shown through in this odd adversity.

FINAL DRAFT

Instead of a "Sweet Sixteen," my hormones cursed me with a "Septic Sixteen." Most girls jump out of beds on their sixteenth birthday anticipating a magical day free from flaws. They have a big bash planned and post pictures of themselves on their Facebook webpages. The birthday girl always looks beautiful, radiant, and flawless. My birthday was not like that. Instead, I lay in my bed frustrated and upset. Painful cysts, annoying whiteheads, and stubborn blackheads plagued my skin and made my special day far from magical.

That morning, my acne was so severe that the cold water against my skin felt like diluted acid, painfully stinging my blocked pores and seeping into my open cysts. While I could overcome this physical pain, the emotional pain caused by the blemishes crushed my confidence. I wanted to feel beautiful, but my face full of imperfections prevented me from doing so. Despite

conventional belief, the world does in fact care about what people look like. People are inherently attracted to those who are pretty, not to those who have pustules on their faces.

Hoping for salvation, I visited my dermatologist, Dr. Greene. I was expecting him to take the time to analyze my skin and discuss possible treatment plans. Instead, within minutes, he prescribed the traditional protocol, BenzaClin. “BenzaClin provides immediate gratification,” he said. I was elated. I was going to look like the birthday girls in their Facebook pictures. After just a few days, my skin began to feel smooth and look radiant. I finally felt that I had the potential to be beautiful. However, the “immediate gratification” came with a price. The BenzaClin caused such agonizing stomach cramps that I sometimes found it hard to walk. I approached my friends who had beautiful complexions in order to find what their secrets were. They divulged that they had been on BenzaClin for years and had experienced similar side effects. This news was discouraging. Clear skin was not worth perpetual pain.

I decided to take control and was determined to find a solution that did not involve more pain and suffering. I flung the BenzaClin into the garbage, wobbled over to my computer, and researched. A total war was about to commence, and I was going to win. Despite having completed several research projects for A.P. Chemistry, I had never felt the thrill that I

experienced when researching acne medications. The findings of this research project would not simply be restated and documented in a school paper. Instead, I would use the information to change my life.

The facts I found shocked me. BenzaClin contains clindamycin, which is one of the most effective antibiotics in treating acne. It also, however, causes pseudomembranous colitis, which can lead to death. Was having a clear complexion really worth dying for? I thought about all of my friends who were on the medication. Did they know this frightening fact? I understood the pressure of looking perfect; I understood how much they all desired clear skin. I could not, however, begin to grasp the idea that this pressure would push a girl into resorting to a medication that could end her life.

I desperately began to look for an alternative. After a few more days of research, I was versed in oral supplements, face washes, and topical gels. I was going to solve this mystery *and* have a flawless complexion. My first research revelation was that small dietary changes could allow my body to effectively fight off acne forming bacteria. Eating healthy, drinking water, consuming probiotics, and Vitamins A and B all contribute to healthy skin. I was thrilled to have

found a potential cure that was both effective and healthy and immediately started to follow my new dietary regimen.

Everyday for the next month, I would jump out of bed and rush to my bathroom mirror. I was amazed at the metamorphosis that was taking place. The only remnant of my acne was tiny bumps that covered my nose and forehead. Having dealt a fatal blow to the pustules and cysts, I was now empowered to eliminate the bumps and congested pores that still assailed my skin.

Once again, I eagerly turned to the Internet and discovered Differin, a mild prescription medication that would unclog my pores without any adverse effects.

At my next appointment, Dr. Greene's signature stern look turned into a smile. He was impressed that I had researched which medications would be the safest and most effective. I now felt like a partner conferring with Dr. Greene rather than a patient receiving instructions. I knew that I would be a good candidate for Differin, which he was happy to prescribe. To my relief, after a few weeks, my skin became porcelain smooth! I felt liberated. I had cured myself.

I told many of my friends about my new routine. Several tried it and were thrilled with their results. It was gratifying to know that my solution would help other girls. In addition, I

gained back my confidence, not because of my clear skin, but because I was not just another girl

who had followed the general protocol. I had created my own.