

My name is Vicki Graikowski and I am 52 years old. I am married to Jim Fuerstenberg and live at 205 W. Fremont. I was officially diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) in March 2009 at Mayo clinic in Rochester.

I would like to tell you about this devastating disease. The cause is unknown and there is no treatment or cure. What happens is the motor neurons (nerves) in the brain and spinal cord die and they can no longer tell the muscles what to do. This results in paralysis and ultimate death when the diaphragm muscle no longer can regulate breathing. I am a RN and I remember caring for someone with ALS as a nursing student back in the late 1970s. I remember saying that is the worst disease someone could get. It's hard to believe I not only have Lou Gehrig's disease, but I have the worst kind (bulbar) with the worst prognosis.

My symptoms started in spring 2008 but I did not seek medical attention as I did not think there was a problem. Every time I brushed my teeth I gagged; I had a hyperactive gag reflex. Then in November 2008, I began having intermittent slurred speech. People would think I was drunk. I noticed difficulty swallowing and fatigue and left work in Jan 2009. I can no longer talk to where anyone understands me. My breathing has been getting worse.

A little over 5,600 people in the U.S. are diagnosed with ALS each year. (That's 15 new cases a day.) It is estimated that as many as 30,000 Americans have the disease at any given time. This Canadian commercial on 'You Tube' really shows what happens with this disease: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0Q4kIx95aU>

Celebrities that have had the disease include: John Drury – Chicago anchorman, David Niven, Angela Lansbury's sister, Jon Stone- co-creator of the muppets.

Les Turner ALS Foundation, affiliated with Northwestern, is the only independent, publicly supported non-profit organization in Chicagoland dedicated solely to the treatment and elimination of ALS. In addition, they provide numerous patient and family services.

On September 12 is the Les Turner ALS Walk4Life – Feel free to join our team, Vicki's Voice, and walk with us to raise awareness! If you can donate to the team, we would deeply appreciate it and all donations will go to the Les Turner ALS Foundation!

Thank you,

Vicki Graikowski and Jim Fuerstenberg
205 W. Fremont St.