

“Never give up on your dreams”

Salimah Mussani — living well with lupus

Salimah is a young golfer from Burlington, Ontario, now 28 years old. What makes Salimah so unique is that she is pursuing a life-long dream to be a professional golfer, and to live well with her lupus. Sometimes the two goals work hand-in-hand, and at other times, it becomes hard to live with both at the same time. But she's not one to give up on a dream.

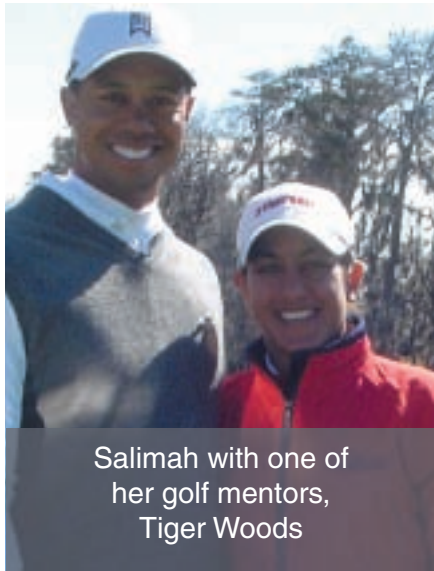
Salimah grew up in Ontario, and was always involved in sports – sometimes playing up to six sports at a time. Initially she was eager to participate in team sports such as soccer and field hockey. But as a competitive person, she turned to golf at the age of 13, and enjoyed the change to focus just on her own skill development. And as the stories have recounted, she showed a natural ability to golf. In 1995 and 1996 she won back-to-back Ontario Junior Championships and in '96 and '98 won the Canadian Junior Championship.

After completing some high school in Ontario, Salimah moved to San Antonio, Texas to finish her high school, and giving her the opportunity to golf year round. She loved the prospect, compared to the typical four month golf season here in Canada. After high school, Salimah attended the University of Texas for two years, and then transferred to Stanford University in California to finish her degree in psychology and business.

When asked “why golfing?” Salimah eagerly answered that she loves the competition - she's very competitive personally - and that every day is different. She cites that the golf courses are always new, she meets interesting people, and even the weather is constantly changing. It's obvious that Salimah thrives on changes, and works hard to manage the challenges she experiences in a healthy way.

At the age of 20 in 2000, following 3 years of bouts of ill health, Salimah was diagnosed with lupus. Like so many other people with lupus, she had numerous health concerns that were treated in isolation. It was the luck in meeting a physician at Stanford University, coincidentally a rheumatologist, who put together all the pieces of the puzzle. She immediately started treatment, and for 2 years battled symptoms, medication side effects, rashes and the everyday challenges that come from having an episodic illness. But her love of golf continued to prevail, and despite the challenges, she golfed.

In 2002 Salimah turned professional, and joined the Duramed FUTURES tournament in early 2003. The Mission of the Duramed FUTURES Tour is to prepare the world's best young women professional golfers for a career on the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) Tour. Five years later, Salimah is going strong, im-



Salimah with one of her golf mentors, Tiger Woods

proving her game, and making a name for herself. She's proud of her accomplishments, but also mentions that living with lupus has had a significant impact on her career and her personal life. These last 2 years have been her most successful professionally, but also very challenging.

In 2006 she won the Michelob ULTRA Duramed FUTURES Players Championship, and won her second consecutive CN Canadian Women's Tour title. This season, she placed fourth on the Lakefield Duramed FUTURES tournament, tied for third at the El Paso Golf Classic plus participated in 16 other tournaments through the FUTURES tour. Here in Canada, Salimah won the Canadian CPGA Women's Championship in August held at the Ladies' Golf Club of Toronto. Margaret Lover, a Lupus Canada volunteer and avid golfer at the club watched Salimah play on her final day and said "her swing is so smooth and easy, she makes it look effortless. It was a really hot day, but despite the heat she was so focused on the task. With her smile and focus, we look forward to watching her for a long time to come".

Along with the highs of winning, there have been the downs of coping with lupus. Salimah recounts how being a part of the golf tour can be very exhausting. Every week she is on the road, playing a tournament on the weekend and spending the week preparing for the event. It's a long time to be away from home. Salimah has to stay out of the sun, so she is learning to play earlier or later in the day. And she said "it's about the quality not the quantity" as a strategy to be prepared for every event.

When asked if being public about her lupus has affected her career, she's quick to answer "not at all". In 2005 she won the Duramed FUTURES Spirit Award for her courage in coping with lupus and pursuing her career in golfing. For Salimah, her golf skills and her lupus were given to her for a reason, and she strives to learn the reasons why. She appreciates the opportunities to raise awareness about lupus, gets lots of support from her fans, her family and the public, and loves when others approach her to tell of their struggles

to battle a health condition. She talked about a fan who emailed her, saying she was inspired by her story and message as she too had lupus. "Things come into our lives for a reason, sometimes on rocky roads, but these can always be viewed as opportunities" Salimah said.

Salimah wanted to join the Walk a Block event this year, but unfortunately her schedule did not allow her to be back in Canada. Salimah wants to be a part of the lupus movement in Canada, and has joined with Lupus Canada as our new "Ambassador". With her new role, Salimah would love to continue to share her story with other people with lupus, and is especially interested in working with other young people. If she can motivate or inspire others with her life journey, she is eager to join in.

When asked what messages motivate her personally, Salimah had many. Words like "courage" and "overcoming fear" are really big in her vocabulary, and her achievements show that she lives what she speaks. She said "grow and learn but don't regret. Negatives can't come from doing something from the heart. Jump off the cliff and let your wings help you fly".

Thanks Salimah, we wish you many successes for 2008, and we look forward to having you as our new Ambassador and working together to conquer lupus.



Salimah participating at a LPGA golfing tournament this summer

photos courtesy of Salimah Mussani