

WOMBAT

FD ALUMNI



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Lisa "Wombat" Butch

I was diagnosed with rhabdomyosarcoma in December 2006 at the age of 25. After a year of surgeries, chemotherapy, and radiation, my whole world seemed to revolve around cancer and hospital visits until it didn't anymore. Once treatment ended and I was able to go back to my old life, I felt lost and confused. Friends had moved away, gotten married, began new careers, had babies, and I had been laying on my parent's couch.

Feeling lost and alone, I happened to discover First Descents while browsing the internet and decided to try a whitewater kayaking camp. Expecting nothing but a fun trip, I found more than I ever dreamed possible with First Descents. After a week of fun, challenge, laughter, support, and accomplishment, I felt whole again for the first time since cancer. I was amazed at how participants and staff supported each other through our new challenge of learning to whitewater kayak, and how cancer was only brought up organically. Being around such a positive group who didn't get awkward when cancer was mentioned made me feel like I fit in immediately and the positivity and laughter allowed me to truly be happy for the first time in a long time.

First Descents changed my mindset from a cancer victim that felt sorry for herself to someone who knows she can overcome any obstacle or challenge, whether it being a big rapid in a river, a scary medical situation, or the challenges of everyday life. I use my experiences with First Descents as a source of strength and inspiration to make it through the hard times and for an ever-growing group of friends that feels more like family.

FD even inspired me to leave a desk job that didn't feed my soul and take the risk of attending a course to become an outdoor trip leader. Kayaking with FD re-awoke a passion in me for being outdoors and challenging myself through adventure activities, and I now lead trips for Outward Bound. Cancer tried to take away my passion for life, but I am lucky because First Descents gave it back one thousand times over.

