Cory, C.E.O. of Gallant Knights Sports Charity Association,

First off, let me put out my unwavering thank you to all the people who volunteered to get *Gallant Knights Sports Charity Association* off the ground and running. Every year the Motorcycle Rally seems to get bigger and this year I personally got to experience the tears of happiness in receiving financial aid from this organization, as an injured veteran suffering from an invisible disease. In 2016 I was diagnosed with bilateral Carpal Tunnel Syndrome (left and right wrists) from all the years working in Operations and Training in various units and all that was required as a Sergeant Medical Technician throughout my Military career. My surgeon at the time convinced me that it would be more beneficial for me to do both wrist surgeries at the same time. Hoping to be medically cleared sooner for any upcoming tours, I agreed. Following the surgery, for one week, I had no pain. It was great. But then I started to notice sharp, almost electric-like shocks going up my forearms from my thumbs on both hands. I was losing strength and there was so much pain with movement and even light touch. I was having pain that was 100 times worse than going into labour (which I’ve done 3 times in the past with no pain meds). I spent the next 2 years doing copious amounts of tests to rule out everything from MS to Parkinson’s. In 2018, I was being reassessed by my Veterans Affairs doctor who mentioned that all my symptoms reminded him of a disease called **CRPS** (Complex Regional Pain Syndrome). At the time, my symptoms were all over the place, my hands and arms would change colour, swell up, and/or worse, I would lose function completely. After seeing a few more specialists including Physio and Mental Health (and travelling back and forth Ottawa to the Pain specialists) I was given the diagnosis of CRPS. I had hoped that finding a name to all the physical pain and frustration would calm my stress and worry, but it did not.

If you’re unfamiliar with CRPS, it’s because it is a rare, neurological and immunocompromised disease with no cure. At the time I was diagnosed, I was told I was only 1 of 3 people from Garrison Petawawa to ever have CRPS. What’s worse is that this disease is also known as the Suicide Disease. Mental health plays a big part on a person with this disease and stress makes the pain flare ups worsen. I’ve experienced this and now know that it is real when people say they hurt more with cold weather. I become nearly [or completely] cripple during the winter with so much pain that it causes nausea and vomiting. Picture not being able to make any life plans for your future because you’re afraid of having to cancel plans due to yet *another* last minute ‘flare up’. Even as I try to continue to work and do my volunteering (and during this Pandemic), I have had to educate people on CRPS in case I have tremors, seizures or other types of pain flare ups happen. There are times when I can’t even move my fingers to clean/dress myself, and yet; there are days when I look and move almost normal. This is what having an invisible disease is like. It is scary and has stopped me from doing hobbies I love, like motorcycling, archery and bicycling with the family. I had been a strong, dedicated worker, mother of 5, Girl Guide and Brownie leader and helper at the local soup kitchen. But by not doing these social and physical activities anymore, I grew depressed and felt alone. I couldn’t do something as simple as ride my bike anymore because of the crippling pain in using my hands and (occasionally) loosing balance.

Gallant Knights’ has helped me get back some of my freedom and mental health by providing me with financial aid for a recumbent bike (a Catrike 5.5.9) so I can get back outdoors with my family and for my health. Unfortunately, these bikes are not cheap, I have never heard of or seen these bikes before. Now that I have one, this has truly raised my spirits and hope knowing that there are people out there that want to help injured veterans gain some sense of physical independence and happiness with sports equipment designed specially to our needs. This bike allows me to use the working part of me, my lower body half. I had always told myself I was going to do the Canadian Army Run some year and always put it off because of work, family, timing, and then having a disease that keeps me from physically be able to run for any distance. Thanks to the support I received from this organization, I was able to use my recumbent bike, do the 26.1km race and come 17th in 766 for the 1st Virtual **Canadian Army Run** with the ***Soldier On*** Team. Thank you again to everyone, I am forever grateful for the work you put into this organization and my family also thanks you so much, they notice that I’m having less bed-ridden days. I plan on getting an indoor bike trainer to use my Catrike during the winter to keep up on the success I’ve started to get having my new bike.

Beyond Thankful & Appreciative,

**Amy Taylor, CD**

Sgt