

I was told I'd never have children

Former Eternal star Kelle Bryan was diagnosed with lupus four years ago. She tells how she has fought this crippling disease to finally get her health back

Kelle Bryan, 28, was in one of the most successful girl bands of the 90s, Eternal. She now runs her own record label and writes for Blue and Liberty X. But for the past four years she's also been battling systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), a chronic disease of the immune system that's often just called lupus.

When did you first realise something wasn't right?
It was in 2000. I had a cold and wasn't getting better, then I woke up and couldn't bend my hand. I thought I'd slept on it in a funny position, but gradually the stiffness started to spread to my other hand and my arms and legs. I could move less and less. Then I got ulcers in my mouth. The doctor said there was nothing to worry about, but eventually my whole body seized up and I knew something was seriously wrong.

How were you diagnosed?
My manager told me to see his doctor, who said: 'I think you've got lupus.' Tests came back negative, but then my skin started to blister all over and I got a butterfly-shaped rash on my face, which is a typical symptom. I was really sick. I was admitted to hospital and diagnosed with SLE.

How seriously was your health affected at this stage?
I had liver and kidney damage because I'd been ill for so long. They said there was no cure, I'd

be on medication for life, I'd get fat because of the steroids and I wouldn't be able to have children. I just sat there thinking: 'Great!'

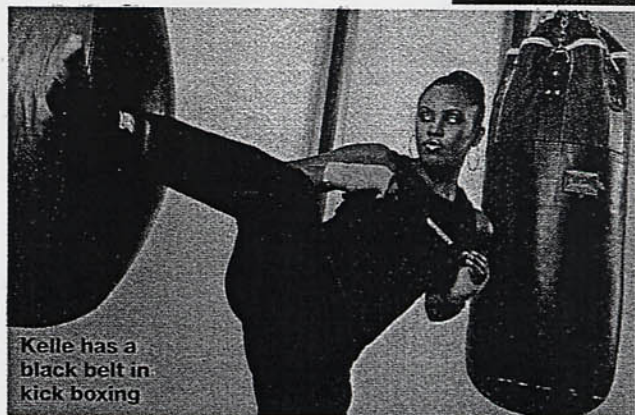
How did you start to recover?
I was in hospital for two weeks, then I went to a health farm. Shortly afterwards, all my hair fell out. That's when I prayed and decided that this disease wasn't going to beat me. From that moment, I got better and better. I've been off medication for a year now. I've never had another attack, my skin has healed and my hair has grown back.

What was your most difficult moment?
When they said I couldn't have children. But I looked into it and found that there was a case in the USA where a woman with lupus had given birth to twins. So I thought: 'If she can, I can.'

How did you get fit again?
I wasn't moving for about three months, so I had to build up my strength slowly. I started by just lifting cans of beans! I went back to step aerobics, but had to rest after only a few minutes. Finally, I started kick boxing again.

Why kick boxing?
I learned it for self-defence. Last year, having done my black belt, a friend of mine suggested I watch her fight. I thought it looked great fun and decided to give it a go.

We've heard you're at the gym at 5am every day to train!



Kelle has a black belt in kick boxing

I'm in training for Fight Night, a charity tournament next month. I train twice a day and I'm having to work really hard to get my fitness up after Christmas. I feel great, though, so it's worth it.

What's a typical training session for you now?
I get to my gym in London at 5am and run with my personal trainer to Hyde Park, where I do some sprinting. Then we come back to the gym for another hour or so. I'm back there at about 4pm, doing cardiovascular work for 1½ hours. I also practise lots of sparring.

Will your family and friends all be there watching you fight next week?
Most of them will, yeah! And having them there will just make me more determined to win. ■
Bridget Ward

Fight Night, sponsored by KX Gym, is at 7.30pm on 4 March at The Roundhouse, London. For more information and tickets, call 020-7243 9995.



Kelle, second right, with her Eternal band mates