How Kindness Conquers MS

by LEEANNE LAPUM

Kindness Will Always Have the Upper Hand Over MS

It’s very easy for me to get discouraged as I face daily challenges. I fight frustration, isolation and depression — none of these things are positive things to deal with in anyone's life.

But they are part of my daily battle as I deal with multiple sclerosis (MS). None of them can be overcome easily — it takes real perseverance on my part. I often find myself struggling to find whether I am of significance to others and to the world around me.

Dealing With Challenges

I began my battle with MS 24 years ago, so you'd think that by now I would be a professional at conquering challenges. That's not necessarily true.

I do have a very strong support system for which I am very thankful. It consists of family, medical resources, and unwavering long-time friends. They all help me through various difficulties.

Although my needs remain fairly constant, there are some variations. There are frequently unpleasant things that must be dealt with. Although a day may start out positively, it can take a drastic turn without any warning.

My husband teaches middle school/high school at a faith-based school a mile from our home. There have been a few times when unforeseen complications have arisen that require my husband to either stay home to care for me, or leave campus at a moment’s notice.

The staff are all aware of our situation. They cover for him so he can come home to meet my needs. Of course, working a mile from home helps as well.

MS can really test the waters as far as friendship is concerned. Many of my old friends have obvious difficulties when it comes to handling my illness.

There have been numerous times when I’ve encountered this negative reaction. We had to attend a funeral, and saw many of our old acquaintances there. They willingly approached my husband and spoke with him, but upon seeing me in my wheelchair they turned their backs and walked away.

You would think that MS was a contagious disease. It was an incredibly painful situation — physically from sitting so long and emotionally from being avoided. It's happened many times before and probably will again.

Kindness Conquers MS Every Time

We occasionally have the opportunity to venture out into the public. We had such an opportunity recently. We’ve

found that some people actually have compassion on us and come to our aid — people we don't even know.

It's so refreshing to know that people care. They aren't scared off by my wheelchair or any of my obvious problems. They open doors for us and various small things like that.

We always go out of our way to thank them and say a few words of appreciation to them. I'm sure that in reality they think nothing of it — they have no idea their kindness has made dealing with MS a little easier.

I have learned so much since my devastating diagnosis. Although my legs no longer work, I have a ready smile and kind words that I hope will brighten someone's day just as they have mine.

You never know the challenges that lie beneath the surface that influences people’s reactions. I’ve just learned that kindness and a smile can lift the spirits of anyone I encounter. My disability will not defeat me. Kindness will always get the upper hand over MS.