

OurMomentum

The importance of connecting

Relationships hold us up

Sometimes we forget how powerful it can be to connect with others. Nearly 25 years ago, when I was volunteering at the National MS Society in Pittsburgh, the Society's support groups were beginning to blossom; people with MS were buoyed by the idea of finding each other, sharing their experiences and problem-solving together. It was in one of those groups that I got to know a woman named Debbie Petrino, who had been recently diagnosed with MS. She had been dealt a tough hand—she was a younger mother with a significant disability—but she didn't see it that way. Instead, she was incredibly vibrant, and lived so robustly. She was one of the people who taught me, early on, that each and every one of us can help make the world a better place.

In 1991, I moved to Connecticut, and Debbie and I lost our connection. Or so I thought. Last November, Debbie mailed me a copy of her new book, **Managing MS: Straight Talk from a Thirty-One Year Survivor**. On the cover page, she wrote me a quick note:

**Dear Cyndi,
You were such an inspiration to me when we met in Pittsburgh at the Society back in the '80s.**

**You helped me 'survive' my MS, and I will be forever grateful.
Fondly, Debbie**

A couple months later, I received a card from another woman, Kathy Yancic, congratulating me on my appointment as CEO of the Society. "Dear Cyndi, I don't know if you'll remember me ..." it began. I remembered her in an instant because she had made such an impression on me—also in Pittsburgh—as someone who took charge and made the best of her circumstances. In her note, she told me, "I thank you for your help and suggestions. Feeling encouraged and empowered in handling my own personal challenges, I continued working as a registered nurse until 2006."

I was so moved to learn that these women felt I made a difference in their lives, after interacting with them for such a brief time. They were **my** inspiration! But that's what we do when we make connections: We hold each other up.

Take Verena Frydberg and Lisa Cohen. These friends—and now business partners—met at Walk MS in New York three years ago. Verena is a former makeup artist for celebrities and top-shelf cosmetics brands, and Lisa is a photographer, graphic designer and artist promoter.

When they discovered their mutual interests and talents, they started Makeover Your MS, a nonprofit that empowers women to feel great about themselves, while facing the challenges of living with MS.

At the National MS Society, we take connection seriously. It's not just lip service. It's who we are. In March, we launched **MSconnection.org**, a community for everyone affected by MS. A place to interact on forums, participate in lively discussions, learn from others and give what you know. It's a place to connect with people who share your interests and issues. Whatever you're going through, you're likely to find someone who's been there, done that and willing to share what they learned.

MS Kills Connection. But more importantly, Connection Kills MS. Give what you know—it will make a difference in someone's life.

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