

PARENTING

## Cookies for a cause

by Mary Elizabeth McNary, MA, CRC

It was Girl Scout Cookies time and my daughter's Brownie troop was planning to corner the dessert market in metropolitan Washington, DC. Each girl bragged that she would sell more cookies than any other Scout. Everyone anticipated a huge success.

My MS was acting up with the heat that summer, and I was too fatigued to care much about cookies. The Brownies were talking like Fortune 500 executives, but I didn't get involved. Certain that there was plenty of time before the order forms were due, I let weeks go by. Imagine how I felt when my daughter came home weeping from a Scout meeting to tell me she wasn't ready and that she had no more time. Because I'd been concentrating on MS, I had neglected to oversee the logistics of my little girl's first entrepreneurial endeavor.

For the umpteenth time since diagnosis, I felt the most devastating effect of MS—its grip on my attention. My family needs and deserves my attention, but MS can be very distracting. For the umpteenth time plus one, I decided to be brave enough to ask for help, so I could pay attention to what was really impor-

A near disastrous Girl Scout Cookies sale reminds the author that parenting trumps MS—and that Society staff want to help.

tant, even though requesting help is always difficult for me.

Below is the e-mail I wrote that evening.

Dear Colleagues,

I'm way out of line to beg for your help, but it is germane to our mission. As you know, the effects of MS on my vision keep me from driving. My 8-year-old, Aisling, came weeping to me last night that **nobody** was ordering Girl Scout Cookies from her because the other girls' moms don't have MS, so **they** can **drive** their girls all over town to sell cookies outside the neighborhood. "Everybody," Aisling sobbed, "had **already** bought cookies from someone **else** and it was really **awful** having a mother with MS because I can't do **anything**, and it's just **no fair!**" The poor kid hasn't gotten a

single order, and the forms are due tomorrow at 6:00 p.m.

If anybody can find it in their heart to order a \$3.50 box of cookies, I'll be eternally grateful. Please let me know today if you can buy a box, so I can tell Aisling that I **can** do something for her, even though I have what she calls, "that stinkin' MS."

Yours gratefully,  
Mary Elizabeth

I sent it out the next morning to my co-workers at the

COURTESY OF THE McNARY FAMILY



Cookie seller, Aisling, left, with her twin, Aidan and the author

National Capital Chapter, where I've been a counselor since the late 1990s. I was hoping to generate orders for at least 10 boxes. I just wanted Aisling to be able to show the girls with able-bodied moms that she had done something to help her troop. I was feeling pretty sorry for myself and did not expect much of a response.

I was wrong. Orders started pouring in. They came from people both in and outside my own department, from former employees, even from the warm-hearted boyfriend of a colleague who had shown him my plea. By the time Aisling had to hand in her forms that evening, she had orders for 71 boxes. She didn't sell more cookies than all the other Brownies, but she did raise a fair bit of money for her troop.

MS is a family disease. Aisling truly suffered that summer because of MS. The disease had monopolized her mother's attention. I'm grateful that National Capital Chapter staff joined the movement to help my daughter and to remind me where my attention belongs, MS or no MS.

The kindness of my colleagues demonstrated that our organization brings out the best in people, whether or not they live with MS personally. What a gift!

Mary Elizabeth McNary, MA, CRC, is a counselor with the National Capital Chapter and a frequent contributor to this magazine.



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JONATHAN WAYNE

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### Some resources for parents with MS

- Through the Looking Glass is a nationally recognized center that has pioneered research, training, and services for families ([lookingglass.org](http://lookingglass.org)).

- [msworld.org](http://msworld.org)—includes a bulletin board parents can use.

- “MS Mommies”—online radio show available at [blogtalkradio.com/msmommies](http://blogtalkradio.com/msmommies)

- **My Grampy Can't Walk**—Vanita Oelschlager's book teaches children to celebrate people who use a wheelchair. Available from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

#### Society publications materials

- **Keep S'myelin**—there are 24 issues of our colorful print newsletter for kids of all ages.

Go online for the interactive versions at [nationalmssociety.org/KS](http://nationalmssociety.org/KS)

- **Someone You Know Has MS: A Book for Families**

- **PLAINTALK: A Booklet About MS for Families**

- **When a Parent Has MS: A Teenager's Guide**

(To get a copy, call your chapter at **1-800-344-4867**, or read online at [nationalmssociety.org/brochures](http://nationalmssociety.org/brochures))

- **Timmy's Journey**—A cartoon on DVD explaining MS to children. (Call your chapter; not available online.)

#### International sources

- [msforparents.com](http://msforparents.com)—A Canadian Web site and chat room

- [msforteens.com](http://msforteens.com)—Canadian teens site

- [msforkids.com](http://msforkids.com)—Canadian preteens site

- [msrc.co.uk](http://msrc.co.uk)—The UK-based MS Resource Centre contains Web resources for children, teens, and parents

- The UK's Multiple Sclerosis Trust site has downloadable materials in their online shop. Go to [mstrust.org.uk/shop](http://mstrust.org.uk/shop) and click on Publications to find **My Dad's Got MS**; **My Mum's Got MS**; and **The Young Person's Guide to MS**.