

Photographs supplied by Amelia Davis from her book *My story : A Photographic Essay on Life with Multiple Sclerosis* (available at amazon.com and Barnes & Noble booksellers)

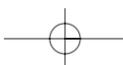
Jackie Waldman

"The Amazing Journey"

*Sickness will surely take the mind
Where minds can't usually go
Come on the amazing journey
And learn all you should know*

Tommy - The Who - 1969

by Glyn Meek





“I just gave up”

Over the last fifteen years or so, this remarkable woman has taken an amazing journey that would terrify the majority of us. After being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 1991, for sufferers from this often debilitating disease, Jackie Waldman has become one of the most sought-after motivational speakers in the United States. Her frantic schedule puts her in front of 200-500 people every week, in addition to working on her sixth book and replying to the hundreds of emails which flood her accounts every day. But, motivational though it is, this has not been a journey without some dreadful low points...

The Life Before

Up until 1991, Jackie had led the perfect life of a successful, North Dallas woman. Born and raised in Dallas, she had married her high school sweetheart Steve, and was raising three healthy children with all the after-school sports, activities and events that entails. Motivated by wanting to attend an ‘Inner Peace’ conference and not wanting to ask Steve for the money for the flight, she had started her own business, Bow Jangles, selling hair accessories, when she had learned how to tie bows on a family vacation to Hawaii. After audaciously and fortuitously convincing ShoeBox Inc. to give her an order for \$1,500, she met Michelle Guerra while buying the ribbon materials to complete this first contract. Within two years, they had turned their initial order into a company with 25 production employees, and 25 field sales reps, and Jackie eventually brought in Cindy Golman as a full-time partner to help run this booming business. Like a lot of women in North Dallas, Jackie was living and succeeding in the American Dream, but...

The Diagnosis

...Jackie had always had a predisposition to ill health. Plagued by an overabundance of surgeries including an appendectomy, a hysterectomy and a number of back operations, she was constantly fatigued. Not the expected tiredness of a woman living a fuller-than-most life, but true fatigue. One morning, stepping out of the shower and starting to vigorously towel-dry her back, she noticed a strange tingling sensation around her waist. The same happened the next day, but spread further down her leg, and the next day, and the next; and by the end of a week, she was numb from her waist to her toes. An initial visit to the doctor diagnosed a possible back or neck problem, but a fortuitous referral to her brother-in-law’s orthopaedic surgeon colleague, Dr. Alex Glogau quickly established that this was no trapped nerve, and she was referred to a neurologist.

Dr. Pedro Nosnik immediately hospitalized her and started to run the usual barrage of tests. MRIs on her neck and back, a spinal tap, and a plethora of blood tests revealed little, but the MRI on the brain finally clinched the diagnosis. On July 12th, 1991, when Dr. Nosnik, a family friend, entered the room to tell the family, they could tell he was upset. At that time, Jackie had



Time with the family is a major factor in Jackie’s life

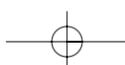
little or no knowledge of what Multiple Sclerosis was, or what were the repercussions of the diagnosis. Her first reaction was relief in finding out that she was not going to be like Jerry’s Kids, but on finding out that there is no cure for the disease was when she first started to cry...

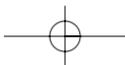
The “Attitude”

...and when she became determined to be the first one who would be cured of the disease. Jackie had always been a “can do” fighter, and did everything she could to fight the disease. She tried oral steroids, IV steroids and even signed up for an experimental drug study in Israel where she and Steve spent 2 weeks in 1992, learning how to inject herself before returning home. She was looking for a cure, not merely fixing the symptoms, so when modern medicine and our propensity for wonder-drugs failed to achieve tangible results, she turned to holistic medicine. Experiences with Chinese herbs, acupuncture, chiropractic and even having the fillings in her teeth removed to avoid amalgam contamination, all failed her and eventually she had to close her beloved company. During this frightening period, the more she tried and failed the more introspective, insular, irritable and irascible she became. In her own words, “I just gave up”. By the summer of 1993, she admits to being angry, scared, bitter and

So you want to do something to help?

www.volunteermatch.com is a website to which Jackie often refers people. A nationwide list of organizations needing full-time and part-time help, and broken down by category and searchable by ‘distance from your home’. This service removes any “I don’t know where to go” excuses you might have for not getting out and doing something to help others.

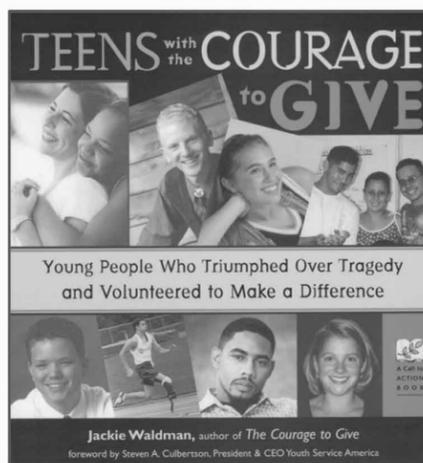
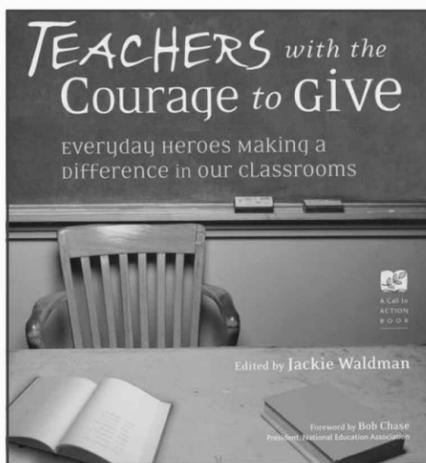
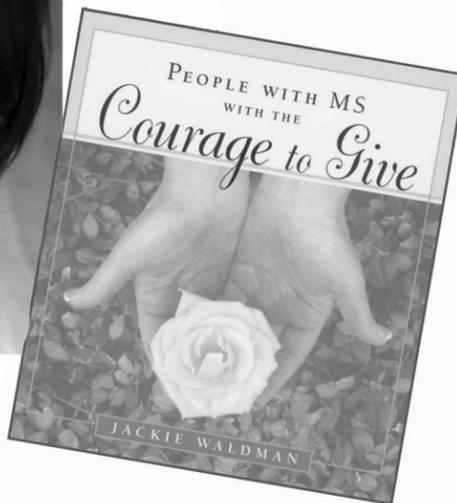
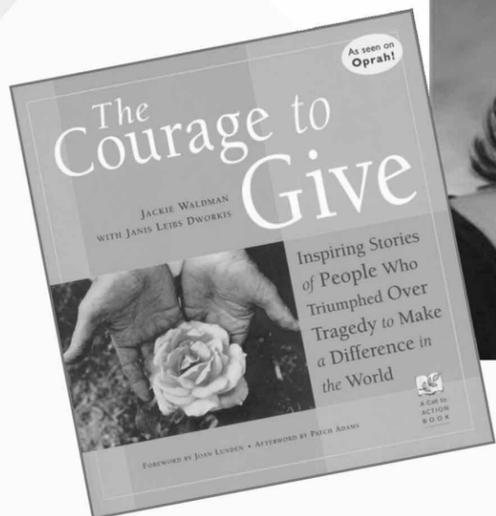




JACKIE WALDMAN

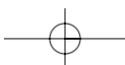
Author

The Courage to Give Book Series



Proceeds of *People with MS with the Courage to Give* will be donated to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society.
The Courage to Give series is published by Conari Press and available wherever books are sold.

Jackie's own website is at www.couragetogive.com





The Texas Chapter of the National MS Society can be reached through their website at:

www.nationalmssociety.org/txh/home/

The Chapter President is Pat Bertotti, and Pat can tell you all you want to know about MS and how to get involved and help. Contact her by phone at 713-526-8967 or by simply emailing her at pat.bertotti@txh.nmss.org

jealous of her friends and even her family for being able to live a life she no longer could even imagine. To put it very mildly, Jackie had become “difficult to live with”, but then the life she had come to hate took a different turn...

The Catharsis

...when some friends came over for dinner one night. Even though she reticently pushed back on joining them and the family with the excuse of “I’ve had a really bad day”, her husband Steve convinced her with that wonderful phrase “Would you do it just for me?”. By this time, the fatigue she had battled all her life was almost overwhelming, and she kept falling asleep at dinner. At one particular point in the meal, she woke up and found a half-eaten éclair in her hands, custard all over her face, and her children staring at her with hugely sad expressions. It was like a bucket of water had been poured over her, and at that very moment she determined that she had had enough of wallowing. She had no idea how to leave her self-inflicted ‘pity party from hell’ but as fate would have it, her friend Dee Silverstein entered the picture with the idea that would change her life and subsequently, the lives of thousands of others.

Dee was involved with the National Acts of Kindness movement and wanted to organize an event in Dallas. Jackie was hooked, and threw herself into the project with every ounce of energy she could muster. In February of 1995, with Jim McCormack as the honorary chairman of the activities, they pulled it off --Dallas Acts Kind-- with a week long set of events and festivities all over Dallas culminating in a Kindness Rally for 10,000 kids at Reunion arena. Jackie was involved again, and after the event she did not want to give up that feeling...

The Life After

...and it had already had an effect on her. Steve mentioned to her that she seemed to be feeling better, and she replied with “My body may not work the same way it once did, but my heart and soul still do”. She did not stop after the event was over. While talking to local schools and non-profit organizations, and temples, churches and mosques to get them involved in Kindness Week, she had established a reputation as someone to listen to. Her fatigue was and is, something she has learned to live with, but in

She exists in ‘MS Time’

spite of still feeling exhausted, she now felt wonderful and her life had gained a huge meaning again. She realized that although she was not cured, she was healing!

Like all snowballs rolling downhill, this one also gathered mass and momentum. In little or no time, Jackie was serving as a source of inspiration to MS sufferers, and putting so much time into service work that at one point she was the co-vice president of a not-for-profit organization overseeing 18 community projects. She appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show, and began responding to hundreds of emails from people who had seen the show or read her first book, *The Courage to Give*, asking how they could ‘get involved’ and start their own healing process. Jackie started speaking regularly, and became a source of inspiration to MS sufferers and other facing challenges in their lives. While ever-willing to suggest, cajole, and point people in all sorts of right directions, she is also capable of berating or even bullying those who indulge in the same self-pity in which she once wallowed. “There is no-one to blame, and the best way to heal yourself is to show kindness to others. It is not our problem, but our attitude that defines us”. As if a life of public speaking and involvement in numerous charitable organizations and an email inbox fuller than most Fortune 500 CEOs were not enough...

The Future

...Jackie has also found time to publish 5 books and is working on her sixth. After an inspirational dream in 1999 prompted her to gather together a series of vignettes about how 30 other people had also had the courage and commitment to help others in spite of their own limitations, she has followed up with a whole series of motivational stories. One book she wrote after the 9/11 disaster has enabled her to donate all the profits to the New York Firefighters Fund and to the Red Cross, and in a similar charitable gesture, she is donating all of the profits from her book *People with MS with the courage to Give*, to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society for services and Research (www.nmss.org)

She continues to heal, but there is still no cure. She remains plagued by the ever present numbness and fatigue, but in the all-too-short (but very memorable) time I shared with her, one would never know. She exists in ‘MS time’, where one hour of a normal person’s time is like 4 hours to her, but is indomitably active and thriving with the help of developments in MS therapy and treatment which have resulted in some drugs that now help to slow the progress of this terrible disease. She is under the care of Dr. Elliot Frohman, Director of the Clinical Center for Multiple Sclerosis at UT Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, and she is responding well to her regime of Avonex2 injections.

She has a wonderful sense of humor, and a superior intellect, but in a society where we overuse superlatives and compliments, it is insufficient to apply such adjectives and epithets to Jackie Waldman, so perhaps simplicity is enough.

She is one of the most courageous and inspirational people I have ever met.

Jackie, your amazing journey continues! ★

