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## **SPEAKER: HELPING OTHERS CAN HEAL; MS SUFFERERS CAN FIGHT THEIR DISEASE BY ASSISTING THOSE IN NEED, A WELL-KNOWN AUTHOR, SPEAKER AND PATIENT SAYS.**

BY MARK TOSZAK

Jackie Waldman and Donna Palmer don't have much in common.

Waldman has written five books, been on Oprah and in USA Today, and travels the country giving inspirational speeches. Palmer, who lives in Greensboro, had a friend drive her to the Grandover Resort and Conference Center on Saturday morning, and when she got up to speak for a minute to the 75 people in the meeting room, her voice quavered with nervousness.

They'd never met before Saturday, but since July of 1991, they have had at least one thing in common: That was the month they got their diagnoses - Waldman in Dallas, Palmer in Greensboro - of multiple sclerosis.

Multiple sclerosis is a nervous-system disease with symptoms ranging from numbness in the limbs to paralysis or blindness. It usually strikes people between the ages of 20 and 50. And though there are treatments for it, there is no cure.

Waldman was in Greensboro on Saturday to preach her message of healing the spirit through service to others. Her speech was sponsored by Biogen, a large pharmaceutical company that makes a Avonex, a drug used to treat MS.

About 75 people - MS patients and their friends and family members - gathered to have copies of one of Waldman's books, "The Courage to Give," signed and hear her message.

"I promise you there's someone out there who's worse off than we are," she said. "MS is just a little piece of who we are, it's not all we are."

Before her illness was diagnosed, Waldman had married her high school sweetheart, had three children and a thriving business, and was active - jogging, doing aerobics, playing tennis. The MS diagnosis threw her into depression. At one point she considered leaving her family, feeling guilty about her burden on them.

But over time, she realized that much of that burden came from her own depression, and she made up her mind to stop her "pity party." And when she saw the movie "Schindler's List," she was inspired to begin volunteering at the Dallas Holocaust Memorial Center. She says serving others helped heal the bitterness in her heart.

And that, she says, is the most important message.

People suffering should look for opportunities to help others, to do the things they've always wanted to do, to do the things they love to do, she says. It's a mistake to let the disease control your life, she says.

That attitude is the real connection between Waldman and Palmer.

"I don't let the MS stop me from doing what I need to do," Palmer said.

Last year, she won a PTA award for volunteering. She estimates she gives about 100 hours a year to her son's school, Murphey Traditional Academy.

Waldman's books are filled with stories of people who have been through tragedy and hardship and still manage to give back. Her latest book, "People with MS with the Courage to Give," is about MS sufferers who give back.

"You've got to inspire other people," Waldman told Palmer as she signed a book for her, a book filled with stories just like Palmer's own.

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