

God Bless America

# Woman's World

THE WOMAN'S WEEKLY

Happy Ending

## Healed by kindness!

Jackie Waldman had MS so severe she couldn't walk . . . or even stay awake through dinner. Doctors said there was no cure, but Jackie discovered a miracle—in her own heart!

The way the light played upon the fabric, the dress seemed crafted of rose petals as Jackie Waldman's 17-year-old daughter twirled. "Mom," Melissa ventured. "How do I look?" Jackie smiled. "Beautiful," she whispered.

Yet there was so much the Dallas mom couldn't say: I'm sorry I couldn't take you shopping for your prom dress. I'm sorry for so many things . . .

Married to her high-school sweetheart, Steve, and a mom of three active kids, Jackie had always relished her busy schedule. So when a deep weariness set in, Jackie thought: Maybe I'm just overdoing it. After all, besides running the house, she was also running a hair-accessory business, Bow Jangles.

Then one morning, 39-year-old Jackie noticed an odd tingling at her waist. That sensation transformed into numbness, sweeping down her body like a tidal wave.

"I can't feel my legs!" she panicked as Steve rushed her to the doctor, where MRIs and a spinal tap revealed that Jackie had multiple sclerosis.

"MS is an autoimmune disease where the body attacks the protective coating surrounding nerve fibers, leaving the muscles weakened," the doctor explained. Medication could ease her symptoms, but there was no cure—and no way of telling how debilitated she'd become.

That night, she told Melissa, 13-year-old Todd, and Michael, 10, "I have a disease called MS, but I won't die. Nothing will even change."

But even with steroids and chemotherapy that made her hair fall out, even with an experimental drug trial, Jackie was changing.

The arms that had held her children felt like knives were stabbing them. Her legs were wobbly. And she was so exhausted, she gave up her business.

Finally, Jackie admitted to herself that "no cure" meant just that. This really is my existence, she sighed in defeat as she spent her days in bed. But it broke Jackie's heart to miss the boys' ball games. And now, before Melissa's prom, she couldn't even take her shopping. In time, she could barely stand.

Then one evening, some friends invited her family for dinner. "They've already cooked . . ." Steve urged.

But halfway through dessert, Jackie nodded off . . . and jolting awake, she could feel custard from an éclair smeared across her cheek.

**This really is my existence, Jackie sighed in defeat as she spent her days in bed**

Mortified, she looked around the table to see the sadness in everyone's faces. If I'm like this now, what will I be like in a year? she suddenly shuddered. In five years? And she knew it was time to make some changes—for her family's sake, and her own.

But how? Soon after, Jackie and her friend, Dee, were chatting. "Have you ever heard of the Random Acts of Kindness Movement?" Dee asked.

Jackie nodded, recalling the book that said a person's act of kindness, no matter how small, changes not only the receiver, but the giver, too.

"In some cities, people are coming together for a Kindness Week," Dee continued.

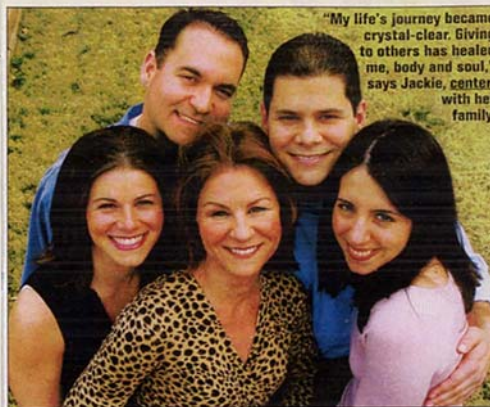
"We could do that here, too!" Jackie gushed.

They brainstormed all night—and not once did Jackie contemplate how tired or achy she was. In fact, she wasn't thinking about herself at all.

MS may affect my body, she realized, but my heart and soul are still me!

Kindness Week came together quickly as Jackie helped organize school rallies, church services and speakers. And soon, all over Dallas . . .

Students slipped hand-picked flow-



"My life's journey became crystal-clear. Giving to others has healed me, body and soul," says Jackie, center, with her family.

ers onto teachers' desks. Young men offered strong arms to elderly ladies. Passersby handed out hot cocoa to chilly construction workers as the police department issued "kindness citations."

And in Jackie's own little corner of the city, Steve was marveling. "Looks like you're feeling better."

"No more pity party for me!" Jackie declared.

After Kindness Week, Jackie began volunteering at a haven for adolescents unsafe in their own homes. And once a week, she was getting a shot of Avonex, a medication that slows the progression of MS. "I have so much more energy!" Jackie told Steve. But the real healing was inside her.

I thought my life was over, she thought. But once I found the courage to give, I tapped into more faith and love than I ever dreamed possible!

There may not be a cure for MS, Jackie wrote in a journal, but there is one for anger, sadness and fear. When we make a difference for someone else, we begin to understand the true meaning of joy. That became her introduction to *Courage to Give*, a collection of stories about people who have gone beyond their own adversity to do for others.

Today, almost 13 years since her diagnosis, Jackie does yoga and tai chi, has compiled four more inspirational books and travels the country, spreading her message of hope.

"You may have MS, but it doesn't have to have you," Jackie tells others. "We are bigger than this disease!" And she smiles, knowing that in the most important way, she is healed.

—Deanna Wilson  
with Kristin Higson-Hughes

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### Reduce your risk of MS

Though the cause of MS remains a mystery, new research suggests you may lower your risk by taking at least 400 IU of vitamin D per day. That, scientists say, may explain why people who live near the equator—where there's more bright sunlight, a good source of vitamin D—are also at lower risk.

For more information, call 800-FIGHT-MS or log onto [www.nationalmsociety.org](http://www.nationalmsociety.org)



Do you have a joyful story to share? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: Happy Ending, Woman's World, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. If we print your story, we'll pay you \$250. Submissions may be edited for style.