



# bike MS | champions

My Mom, Beth Michaels, was diagnosed with MS in 1969. I was 5, my brother, Jeff, was 8. My parents (Beth & Ken Michaels) had been married about 10 years.

The MS progressed as we grew up. Mom suffered from vertigo, pretty severely at times; she experienced weakness in her legs, then some loss of sensation in her fingers. She was easily fatigued. As the MS progressed Dad picked up the slack around the house. He started doing more and more of the household chores. As the disease took more of her capabilities my Dad took on more of her care and our care. After retiring, her ability to walk diminished from walking with a cane to a wheelchair. She has trouble with the dexterity in her hands. She used to sew, knit, crochet, and she had the most beautiful handwriting and now some days she has trouble feeding herself and can't write her name. She can no longer take care of many of her most personal needs. Dad became her full-time care giver. Every area of their lives that was her part to manage Dad has taken over because she simply can't do those things any longer. It was a constant struggle for her to feel useful. Dad cared for Mom at home for 15 years, until just 3 years ago when she moved to a nursing facility near their home.

I think my parents are a remarkable couple. Raising a family can be an uphill battle for many couples. Add in the stress of a chronic illness like MS and many couples just wouldn't know how to handle it. I won't say my parents always knew the best thing to do or the best way to handle things that came up, but they always made their relationship a priority despite their children and despite Mom's illness. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary last summer.

Mom is an avid reader. The Occupational therapists at the nursing facility are trying to help her learn to use a computer which means I might get to have email correspondence with her one day! My parents go to the theatre, the symphony, and enjoy many of the activities the nursing facility provides. My Dad, now under much less physical and emotional stress, spends a part of every day with Mom either at the nursing facility having lunch or playing bingo, or they go out to eat and spend the afternoon together.

It's been a long haul for my folks and for us as a family. Their lives are not and have not been at what they planned 51 years ago when they married, but they have been happy and their children adore them. Not a bad journey to look back at. My parents inspire me to try to be more caring, more compassionate, and to overcome without complaint, the obstacles I run into in my daily life. They are both in my mind MS Champions.