

Jill Jutila • Cloquet

*"I can control the sails
but not the wind."*

"I can control the sails but not the wind." These are the words that Jill Jutila has tried to live by ever since she heard them from a previous doctor.

Jutila was diagnosed with MS in 1987. She and her children already had some experience with the disease because her mother also had it. "I try to keep an upbeat attitude. I got it from watching my mom. When she couldn't do something, she didn't dwell on it. She accepted it and moved on."

Like her mother, Jutila accepts that she is no longer able to partake in some of the activities she once enjoyed. She can no longer take long walks or shopping excursions. "I save more money that way," she laughs. Now, Jutila enjoys reading and traveling. She is especially looking forward to a trip she plans to take to Chicago when her second grandchild is born.

She is employed full-time as an abstracter at Carlton County Abstract and Title Company where she has worked for 22 years.

Jutila enjoys being with friends and making new

friends. One of the ways that she has been able to do this is through the Carlton County support group. Jutila says that although many people are hesitant about joining a support group, it truly is a beneficial experience. "It is really a camaraderie of people. We don't just talk about MS."

In addition to meeting new people, Jutila looks forward to helping other people with MS. In March, she was trained for the Tell-A-Peer Program. She says, "Being acquainted with other people with MS has been great. Take advantage of it—don't hold back."

Through her journey with MS, Jutila is grateful for "meeting a lot of new people and learning about myself—what I can do and what I can't do. Everything does not have to be done right away—it can wait; the sky is not going to fall in."

To those newly diagnosed with MS, Jutila says, "Take one day at a time. Do not be overwhelmed by the enormous amount of information at the beginning. And don't worry about tomorrow."

Gina Meissner • Grand Marais

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“As much as MS has taken from me, it has given to me,” says Gina Meissner, who was diagnosed with MS in 1985. Meissner says that MS has taught her organizational skills and that life is not a rat race. “Because it takes me longer to do things, MS has made me slow down and smell the roses.”

Through the MS support group that she leads, Meissner has met many interesting people. “I’ve gotten to meet a wide variety of people from different age groups and walks of life that I wouldn’t have met otherwise.”

Meissner has worked for more than 15 years as a medical laboratory technician, a position which requires her to work more than 40 hours per week, some at night. She works closely with doctors when they diagnose a patient with MS, and often patients turn to her with questions.

Her advice to them is to “take one day at a time because MS does not have a schedule.” She also tells them to “talk to others who have MS.” After all, she says,

“Knowledge is power. The more you know about the illness, the less dark holes there are to be afraid of.”

Meissner points out, “You can still function with MS and be part of society and life. Sometimes you just have to be more creative.” Meissner has used creativity to modify the activities she once enjoyed rather than give them up completely. She used to love to cross-country ski; now she enjoys snow-shoeing. She used to ride 20-30 miles on her mountain bike; now she rides to the end of her 500-foot driveway.

One less appealing modification is her new riding lawn mower. “I used to love mowing the lawn with a push mower. I revel in the warmth of summer after six months of winter, and nothing smells better than a freshly mowed lawn.”

Meissner enjoys flower gardening and arts and crafts, such as basket-weaving and crocheting. She says, “The secret to being happy in life is not to do the things you like, but to like the things you do. Laughing helps. If you can laugh, that’s half the battle.”