Life is full of moments that define us, but I wonder whether those moments define our lives and who we are? For example: If someone wins a million dollars in the lottery, isn't the winner automatically redefined as a millionaire? Likewise, when someone adopts a child, aren't they immediately reclassified as a parent? The list goes on. But what happens when someone receives a medical diagnosis? How does this redefine them? As sick? It is a question I think about often and my answer usually changes with the tide.

My mother was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) over 10 years ago, after being misdiagnosed for years. She therefore missed a critical window of time to receive medication that would likely have slowed the progression of the disease.

Fast forward 10 years and countless doctor visits later. Currently my mother manages with pain medication and her iron will. She struggles with her speech, her balance, and has lost most of her strength. As if that weren't enough, she suffers from crippling migraines. She rarely drives or leaves the house because MS is unpredictable. Perhaps the most heart wrenching of all, she can’t enjoy her grandchildren. She looks on, or listens to stories I tell her about other people caring for my children while I’m at work, because she is unable to do so. I know it breaks her

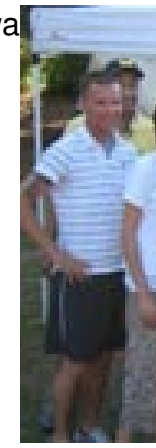
heart – shatters it is more likely. There are moments when I really need a mom, but I can't and won't bother my mother because I know how desperately she needs her rest. Although some days, the cynical part of me wonders, "what is she resting up for?" My hope is that it's for a day when a new treatment or medication can restore her to some semblance of the person she used to be.

It's a tough road for those diagnosed. MS is a chronic, often debilitating disease of the central nervous system and affects everyone differently. There are several stages of MS, and those people suffering with MS may go through one or all of them. Nearly 400,000 people in the United States suffer with this disease that STOPS PEOPLE FROM MOVING. Little by little, it works through the body like a poison, preventing people from their daily activities that once defined them.

MS is not considered a hereditary disease. However, a number of genetic variations have been shown to increase the risk of developing the disease. The risk of acquiring MS is higher in relatives of a person with the disease than in the general population, especially in the case of siblings, parents, and children. The disease has an overall familial recurrence rate of 20%. It seems to be more common in some ethnic groups than others. Obviously there's work – and research – to be done.

So here comes the question again. Is the MS diagnosis a new definition for my mother? Has she suddenly morphed from being my mother to just being her diagnosis? She's Kathy Bauer, for goodness sake. She's the woman who slapped the back of my head (oh and the heads of several of my friends) in church if I dared goof off (seriously, you'd be amazed at how tough your head can get), the woman who taught me the importance of being myself, how to laugh at myself, how to work hard for what you want. She is the woman who worked six nights a week through my childhood so that she could be a very present mother during the day. MS is not who she was or who she is.

I have been asked over the years how and why I "put myself out there" for all to see. I am sure it would be much easier, much more comfortable for me to keep my personal life to myself, but then that truly would sentence my mother to being a mere number in the 400,000 currently diagnosed. She's not a number. She's a wife, a mother and a grandmother. She's intelligent, funny, stubborn and very sensitive. Her favorite color is yellow and she loves that godforsaken Home Interior garbage (sorry, Mom). She can remember what I did to make her angry at age 10 and somehow make it relevant today. She's Kathy. Those are the words that define her, not MS.



Three years ago I became captain of an MS Walk team: TEAM BAUER POWER, to raise awareness, funds and hope, armed with the belief that in the near future, there will be a cure for MS. I'm helping in the best way I know how – by talking it about, writing about it. I hope you're listening and reading.

I've had some special friends join me along the way, some from childhood who promise to walk by me the day of our area's local MS Walk (October 15, Hilton Head Island) and some whom I've come to know on a business and personal level who just want to help. They want to BE THERE WHEN IT MATTERS MOST. I'm indebted to EarthFIT Training Facility and Dancing Dogs Yoga for their honest desire to help me -us - fight against this disease. I'm working with some of the strongest (mentally and physically) people in the health and wellness industry who pack a powerful punch – this time aimed at MS.

Saturday, September 17, 1-3 p.m. : "Dancing Dogs Yoga & Team Bauer Power Kick MS' Asana"

Owner of Dancing Dogs Yoga, Shelley Lowther, will lead an all levels yoga flow session. Suggested donation of $20 per. 100 percent of the proceeds directly benefit the National MS Society. Register online at www.dancingdogsyoga.com

Saturday, October 8, 9-11 a.m.: "EarthFIT & Team Bauer Power Fight Against MS"

The coaches of EarthFIT Training Facility are offering two training sessions, open to the public, that will directly benefit The National MS Society and its efforts to find a cure for MS. The sessions will be offered for $10 each and will be held at 9 and 10 a.m. and will last approximately 30 minutes each. At the end of each session, attendees will be given the opportunity to take a jab directly at MS (you'll have to show up to see what we're talking about). Register online at www.beaufortpersonaltraining.com

All proceeds raised will be turned in by Team Bauer Power on MS Walk Day, October 15. More info at http://walkncp.nationalmssociety.org/site/TR?fr_id=17493&pg=entry

Thank you to The Lowcountry Weekly *for their contribution to this cause and for encouraging me to "put myself out there."*