

[A lasting legacy](#)



“Miss Susie’s” last gift to the National MS Society capped 32 years of dedicated service.

by **Laura Pemberton**

Susan M. Collins, or “Miss Susie,” as she was affectionately known to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, lived a quiet, humble life.

She spent her 32-year career with the Society as a receptionist, office manager, unofficial office historian and fundraising project coordinator in the Atlanta office.

“She was a woman of uncommon fortitude,” says Georgia Society President Roy Rangel. “She lived in a modest home. She didn’t drive or own a car. She walked to the bus stop and took the bus and then a train to travel the 20 miles to work every day.”

Frugal and unassuming, Miss Susie “wore the same coat the entire 13 years I knew her,” Rangel recalls. “She was just herself.”

So when Miss Susie died in 2017 at the age of 71, her \$250,000 bequest to the Society took everyone by surprise.

“We knew she didn’t spend much money, but she never talked about her financial situation. She just wanted to help people with MS in any way she could, and she continues to do that even after her life here on Earth,” Rangel says.

The Collins family was also surprised by Miss Susie’s bequest, but not by her passion for the MS movement.

“She was a very private lady,” says her brother Jeff Collins. “She was proud of her accomplishments, but she didn’t gloat about what she did.”

Lawry Circle

Named in honor of Sylvia Lawry, who founded the National Multiple Sclerosis Society in 1946, the Lawry Circle includes people who demonstrate their commitment to improving the lives of people affected by MS by establishing a deferred gift to the Society through their will, trust or estate plan. There are no minimum gift levels.

“A bequest to the National MS Society through your will provides continuing support for critical programs and services and furthers research for the MS community,” says Julie Upham, associate vice president of major gifts for the Society. “The process is simple to complete, and no amount is too small to leave a lasting legacy.”

Upham says a gift to the Society through a will has several advantages:

- Charitable gifts made through your will are 100 percent deductible for estate tax purposes
- A charitable bequest may place your estate in a lower estate tax bracket
- You may specify that your bequest is used for general purposes of the Society or for a particular program of interest or earmarked solely for MS research
- Your gift ensures your continued support of the Society’s mission
- Establishing a deferred gift for the Society through your will, trust or estate plan entitles you to lifetime membership in the Lawry Circle

Deferred gifts include:

- Bequest intentions in a will
- Charitable gift annuities
- Charitable trusts
- Designating the Society as beneficiary of a retirement account
- Designating the Society as beneficiary of a life insurance policy or the donation of a policy

(Please note that this information is not intended as legal, tax or investment advice. For such advice, please consult an attorney, tax professional or investment professional.)

But Miss Susie’s bequest was far from her only contribution to the Society.

Before joining the Society staff in Atlanta, she had modeled professionally in Chicago and New York and worked for professors at Columbia University and the University of California. She attended the University of Michigan.

Miss Susie was an integral and beloved part of the Georgia staff, serving as the de facto editor and archivist.

“She was brilliant. Her intellectual capacity was amazing,” Rangel says. “She was like our Google. We could say, ‘Miss Susie, when did the Bike MS ride start?’ and she’d say, ‘Oh, 1983.’ And I never gave her anything to review that she didn’t return covered in red ink.”

Rangel remembers when he joined the staff in 2004, hearing a strange clicking noise coming from Miss Susie’s office.

“She was in there typing acknowledgements on a typewriter,” Rangel says with a laugh. He and the staff helped her learn to use a computer.

“She could do anything she put her mind to,” he says. “She grew with us. She learned a lot from us, but we learned a lot from her.

“When she had something to say, everyone listened,” Rangel recalls. “She didn’t say much, but whatever she said we took to heart.

Some passionate people are loud and aggressive. She exhibited her passion in a different way.”

Rangel calls Miss Susie “a wonderful human being. I feel lucky to have known her.”

Says her brother: “She was a very caring and interesting person. She was an unfailing friend.”

Laura Pemberton, based in Birmingham, Alabama, is the National Multiple Sclerosis Society’s director of content. She’s been with the Society since 2014.

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